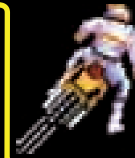
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

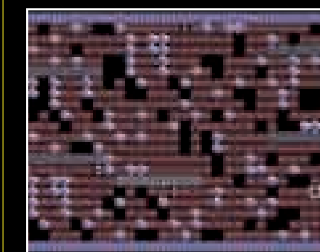
retro* GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE



ENDURO RACER
THE GREATEST OFF-ROAD BIKE GAME OF ALL TIME

THE DEFINITIVE... BOULDER DASH
DIGGING UP THE DIRT ON THE CLASSIC PUZZLE SERIES



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CLASSIC GAME
ALEX KIDD
GREAT PLATFORM GAMES DON'T END WITH MARIO

THE MAKING OF...
MARBLE MADNESS
BEHIND THE SCENES OF ATARI'S ISOMETRIC HIT

THE COMPLETE HISTORY: FROM SPACE SHIP TO NEW INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD

THE BIG REVIEW
SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL
DOES NINTENDO'S SCRAPPER STILL HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

NEC'S PC-FX
DISCOVER WHY NEC'S HOME-GROWN CONSOLE NEVER STOOD A CHANCE

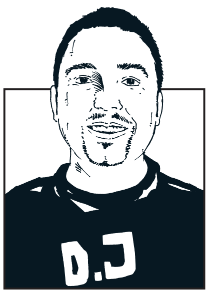
SORCERY+
SO WHO SAID THAT AMSTRAD CPC GAMES COULDN'T BE BRILLIANT?

ALTERED BEAST
ONE OF THE WEIRDEST VIDEOGAME ENDINGS THAT YOU'LL EVER SEE

BORDER DOWN
HOW G.REV CREATED ONE OF THE DREAMCAST'S BEST SHOOT-'EM-UPS

THE RETROBATES

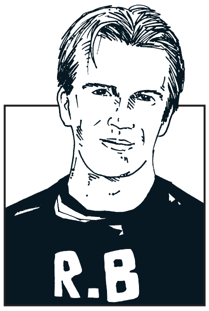
FAVOURITE KONAMI FRANCHISE



DARRAN JONES

Castlevania without a shadow of a doubt. While the NES games weren't without their merits, both the SNES's *Super Castlevania IV* and the PlayStation's *Symphony Of The Night* will always be the highlights of the series for me.

Expertise: Eviscerating ninjas
Currently playing:
Ninja Gaiden II
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



RICHARD BURTON

Gradius – the king of side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups. Add the power meter weapons selection, the almost copyrightable 'Konami Code' and a dose of 'shoot the core!' and you have a nailed on classic series.

Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Technician Ted
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



STUART HUNT

It has to be *Contra*. I was more than pleased with Konami's handling of *Shattered Soldier* and *Contra 4*. The series is still delivering the goods even after 20 years.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Bully
Favourite game of all time:
Bully



ASHLEY DAY

Metal Gear. Every game from the MSX original to *Metal Gear Online* has absorbed me over the last 21 years. Hideo Kojima virtually created the stealth genre and has evolved and defined it ever since, constantly staying ahead of the competition.

Expertise: The games of Team17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Devil May Cry 4
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



PAUL DRURY

Undoubtedly and unashamedly the *Dancing Stage* series. Here's to another decade of me looking like a tit.

Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Actionauts
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

Franchises make me grumpy. With Konami, I'm more interested in individual titles (*Frogger, Scramble, Hyper Sports*, and so on.). Okay, okay, I'll say *Gradius* at a push. Now put down that bat, Darran!

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
WAR! Never been so much fun! (*Cannon Fodder*)
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

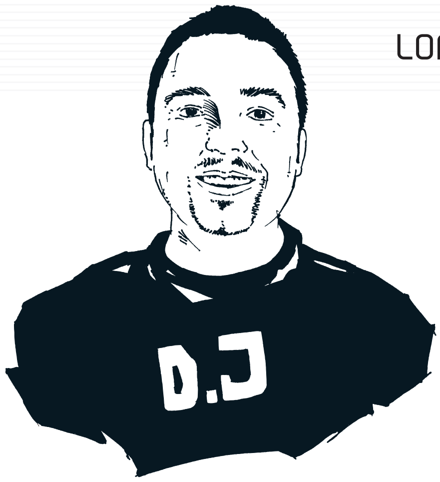


MIKE TOOLEY

Silent Hill. This dark and dreary town disturbs the gamer on all sorts of levels, with hideous crimes played out to sanity-damaging audio. Even in my late thirties I won't play it alone without the lights on. Good movie, too.

Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
Lost Odyssey
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!

LOADING...



I've been playing a lot of *Ninja Gaiden II* this month. Hardly the sort of opening sentence you'd expect to read in a magazine dedicated to classic videogames, but bear with me, as this does have relevance.

So anyway, there I am disembowelling bad guys, effortlessly running along walls and carving bloody holes in *Gaiden*'s huge and spectacular looking bosses when it suddenly hits me; Tecmo's latest Xbox 360 game is probably the most retro title I've played since *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* ate up way too many hours of my life.

Sure, it's incredibly pretty and looks every inch the current-gen title it so obviously is, but there's an innate accessibility and underlying simplicity to it that can be seen in any number of classic 8 and 16-bit titles. It's also ridiculously hard, another homage to the classic days of old.

Now I'm certainly not suggesting that Tecmo's latest release has purposely plundered the arcade stylings of the past, where death came quickly and often – all the better for eating your precious ten pences – but it's interesting to see certain aspects of newer gamers returning to the past in order to help shape the future of gaming. Let's hope it continues.

Enjoy the magazine







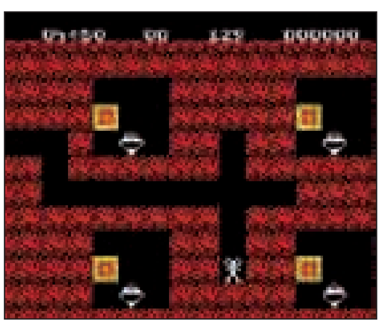
CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK: **KONAMI**

24 CONTRA, METAL GEAR, CASTLEVANIA – JUST A FEW OF THE CLASSIC FRANCHISES THAT KONAMI HAS CREATED OVER THE PAST 39 YEARS





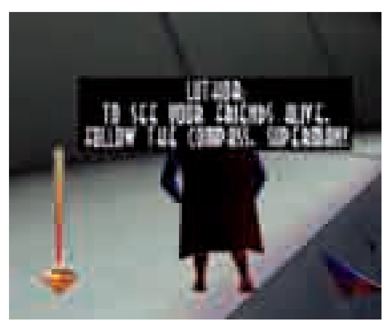
THE DEFINITIVE…
BOULDER DASH

32 Stuart Campbell's latest indispensable guide reveals everything you ever needed to know about Rockford.



RETROINSPECTION
PC-FX

46 Yes, it looks like a giant PC tower, but there was a lot more to NEC's PC-FX than first met the eye.



RETRO SHAMER
SUPERMAN 64

54 We never thought you'd nominate a game that would make Stuart cry, but you've gone ahead and done it.

INSIDE
At-a-glance retro sections…

ESSENTIALS

THE HISTORY OF STAR WARS - PART II



THE MAKING OF...



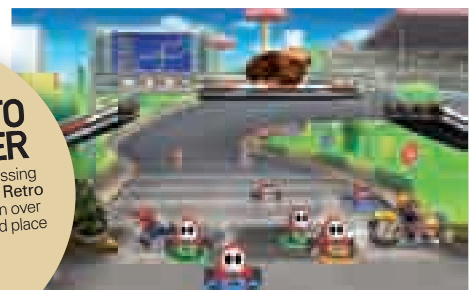
RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it





SUBSCRIBE TO RETRO GAMER

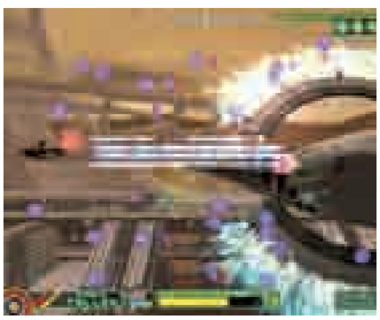
Can't stand the thought of missing the next marvellous edition of **Retro Gamer**? Then simply head on over to our subscriptions pages and place your order now!

p98



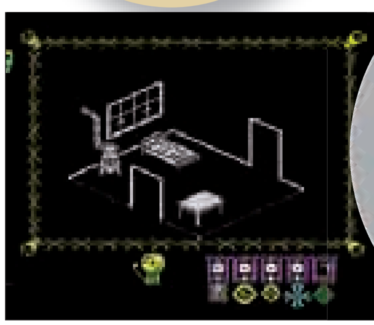
WHY YOU MUST PLAY

ENDURO RACER



THE MAKING OF...

BORDER DOWN



DESERT ISLAND DISKS

ALLY NOBLE







THE GOOD BOOK

RETRO GAMER EXAMINES THE LATEST SPECTRUM GUIDE



Back in issue 48 we reported that Paul Johns and Michael Fraser were teaming up to produce a series of books that would chronicle and look back at iconic and classic Spectrum games. The book are a little different than most out there as many of the reviews have been written by the retro community, including several reviews by regular RG forumites Paranoid Marvin, SirClive, Duds and Uglifruit. We caught up with the guys to chat with them about the first book and to find out what's next for *The Spectrum Games Bible*. Here's what they had to say…

■ Where did the idea behind *The Spectrum Games Bible* originate?

Paul Johns – I've always wanted an A-Z book of Spectrum games. Andrew Rollings' book was exactly the type of thing I was after. I really enjoyed reading it when it came out, but being greedy I wanted to read more and was hoping he might do a sequel. I like reading Spectrum reviews and when I found the Rubber Beermat website (run by Michael) I suddenly thought this could be the basis for a book.

Michael Fraser – From my perspective, PJ sent me an email asking if I'd help out and contribute to a book he was wanting to create – as I've already reviewed a ton of games for my website I thought it was a natural progression. I offered to be co-author and we came up with the idea of paying for reviews (50p a review), which helped generate a fair bit of interest.

■ You obviously have a fondness for the Spectrum, what are your favourite Spectrum games?

PJ – I have a huge fondness for the Spectrum and its games. I was a master at *Match Day* and I still play *Match Day II* a lot. I really like the arcade conversions of *Commando* and *R-Type* but I would have to say that *Bomb Jack* is my favourite Speccy game. The graphics and sound feel dated but to me it's all about playability, lots of Speccy games haven't lost that at all, which is why all these years later people are still playing them.

MF – I've got quite a few. What I really like about the Speccy is that there are loads of games that I'm still discovering. I've been stupidly obsessed with *Chaos* for a long time, though recently I've been playing a lot of *BeTiled!*, which was released last year. All time favourites include *Pac-Mania*, *Power Drift*, *Rainbow Islands*, *Chase HQ* and *Thrust*.

■ When did you start the project and how long has it taken you, has it all been worth it?

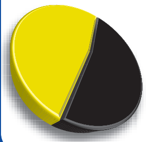
PJ – We started the project in about November and created a 'test book' to see how it would look. We were pretty impressed with the results and decided to collate reviews from the web and add more from fellow gamers.

MF – It's definitely been worth it. Book 1 has taken a long time to produce, compared to

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE FORUM

VISIT WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM/

If somebody wrote an Amstrad review book would you guys buy it?



■ Yes: Give Arnold a book deal. **53%**

■ No: Not a chance. **47%**

Book Two, even though I had the luxury of being on garden leave for half this year. We spent a lot more time on Book 1, getting it right, wrestling with formatting (though I left PJ to sort out Word-related issues). Also, Book 1 took longer because I accidentally deleted the auto-generated contents pages when I was editing it.

■ How did you come up with the idea of involving the retro community?

PJ – A lot had to do with time. We could have written all the reviews ourselves but it would have taken so much time and I'm not a very patient person! I wanted to have the book sooner rather than later, and I thought it would be great to get other people's opinions and reviews on games.

MF – As a collaboration, the series has its own unique standpoint; there are reviews which are based on the feelings and thoughts of when the games were originally played, to those which are more akin to those you'd find in magazines of the time. It's no one person's viewpoint and I think it works well as you get the benefit of hindsight.

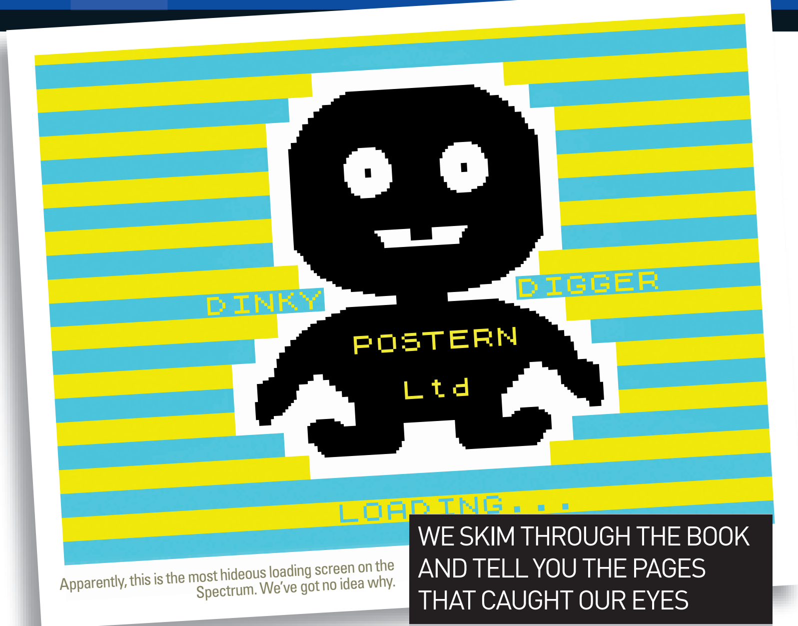
■ How difficult has it been collating the reviews and putting the book together?

PJ – It was quite tedious typing in all the names of the games that appeared in the book (about 300 for Book 2), but it's rewarding seeing the gaps getting filled day by day and eventually having this great document with lots of reviews.

MF – It's my job to read the finished article before PJ sends it to lulu.com. It's great to get to read the almost-finished article before it gets published. The test book, which PJ mentioned, took me over 14 hours to read – I was seeing reviews in my sleep! Book 1 was more manageable, which I split over a few days. That said, I still missed the odd typo and there's the odd grammar issue. But no publication is perfect.

■ For anyone who's thinking about writing a similar style of book (an Amstrad bible with any luck), is there any advice that you can give them?

PJ – It can be a long painful process with all the reviews and nitty gritty bits to do, but I do think it's worth it. We 'should' break even with the first book but neither of us are in this to make a profit, I'm just looking forward to reading a lot of great reviews by people passionate about retro gaming.



Apparently, this is the most hideous loading screen on the Spectrum. We've got no idea why.

MF – Work with someone and share the load! I wouldn't have tried this on my own and working with PJ has been great fun. Bouncing ideas off each other has been really useful. I'd say plan as much as possible but above all, you need to be passionate about your subject. PJ and I knew we weren't doing this to make vast pots of money, but we have something that we can be proud of and enjoyed creating.

■ What's been the general feedback you've received since the book's release?

PJ – I must admit I was nervous. I know there are so many different views and opinions from the retro community. Overall though it's been very positive and it's great when we sell books on lulu or eBay and receive positive feedback.

MF – I've read a lot of positive comments on the WoS forum, which has made me feel proud. There has been some feedback about how to improve the books, which is something we can take on board and if possible use for the remaining four titles. It's good to see that people want to write for the books, which can only be a good thing.

■ Do you feel the book would have benefited from being in colour?

PJ – There's a link on lulu for a full-colour version and we've sold a few but it's a little pricey. Ideally I would have liked to have gone to a publisher, but I just couldn't risk putting up a chunk of money up front. It's more a labour of love rather than a profit-making idea. I really can't wait to have all six books on my shelf with reviews of 1,600 or so Speccy games!

WE SKIM THROUGH THE BOOK AND TELL YOU THE PAGES THAT CAUGHT OUR EYES

MOST HIDEOUS LOADING SCREEN: DINKY DIGGER, page 81

GAME WITH THE GREATEST TITLE: ERIC AND THE FLOATERS, page 88

MOST NOVEL USE OF STICKMEN: JUMPING JACK, page 100

BEST USE OF INNUENDO: PENETRATOR, page 116

OGRES ARSE OF A FIGHTING GAME: KUNG FU, page 215

MF – As PJ says, a full-colour book is available, and it would have been great to have it at a lower price, but it wasn't possible. Still, the option is there for people who require it. The content is still the same, so people are still getting a high-quality, enjoyable read, regardless of which style they choose.

■ Cheers guys, is there any thing else you would like to say?

PJ – We welcome more reviewers! If people go to www.spectrumgamesbible.co.uk they can see a list of the other books that we are doing and the games which still need reviewing. Simply find a game which is not reserved, send me your review (200-400 words) and then once the book comes out we pay everyone via PayPal for their work.

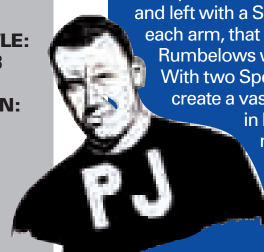
MF – Book 2 (1985-1986) is out early July in time for Retro Fusion and then Book 3 (1987-1988) is already about 50 per cent done and will be out probably late August.

The Spectrum Games Bible 1982-1984 is out now and available to buy from www.lulu.com.

THE FACES BEHIND THE BOOK

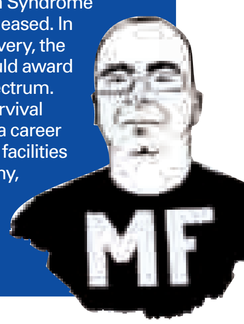
We're not sure who exactly wrote the bible (we think it was Jesus but don't quote us on that). The Spectrum bible, however, we know was the creation of Paul Johns and Michael Fraser. Here are their faces, drawn by the talented Anthony Stiller, and some made up libellous facts about the pair – it's okay though we've checked with them first so no legal comeback for muddying your good names, eh chaps?! (Smiling worryingly – Ed)

Paul Johns



Paul grew up on the mean streets of Berkshire. At the tender age of four months he was taken under the maternal wings of a gang that looted computer game stores for budget games and then palmed them off as new releases to foreign truck drivers. On 15 December 1984, Paul walked silently into a branch of Rumbelows and left with a Spectrum under each arm, that particular branch of Rumbelows would later implode. With two Spectrums, Paul would create a vast computer empire in Manchester, where he now works from home, listens to Oasis and writes online training courses and books about the Spectrum.

Michael Fraser



Michael was born in Hartlepool in the Seventies. He remembers it being a pretty glum place but admits it "now has a bit of colour in its cheeks". His first foray into Spectrum gaming happened when he was mysteriously press-ganged into playing *The Hobbit*. Eventually, everyone involved developed Stockholm Syndrome and Mike was later released. In recognition of his bravery, the city of Hartlepool would award him his very own Spectrum. His leadership and survival instincts led him into a career as a team leader for a facilities management company, and to start the excellent Speccy review site: The Rubber Beermat.

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

LAST-MINUTE NEWS



The game looks the part – a melting pot of different gaming styles and primary colours.

A WET DREAM FOR DREAMCAST OWNERS

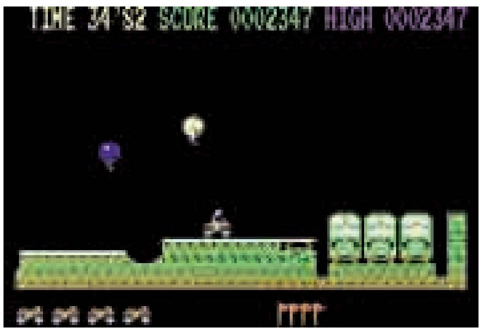
As we were going to press (well, not quite), the postman delivered us a Blu-ray shaped package. Darran excitedly ripped the thing open tentatively hoping inside was his copy of *Showgirls* (Lying bast… – Ed), but instead greeting him was a copy of *Wind And Water: Puzzle Battles* for the GP2X and DC. From what we can gather it looks like a puzzle game that blends elements of beat-'em-up, RPG and mini-games and it looks pretty darn good. The game is a collaboration between Yuan Works and German-based publisher RedSpotGames – the latter some of you will associate with the DC port of *Last Hope*. Given that we're such big fans of the machine, and we never need an excuse to pull the DC out of the games' cupboard, expect a review pretty soon.

KIK… STARTING UP AGAIN

FREELANCER IN SHAMELESS PROMOTION

Our latest addition to the Retro Gamer team is Jason Kelk, aka T.M.R to all you forumites.

He can now be found doing wonderful things in our Homebrew section (to be honest Stuart was pretty pants at it – that weird *Sliding Doors* review he wrote really was the final straw). Thankfully, our new anchorman isn't just a huge fan of the homebrew scene he also practises what he writes. One of his projects has been to port the C16 version of *Kikstart* over to the C64. Now we know what you're thinking, the C64 had its own port of Shaun Southern's sublime little biking game (and very good it was too), but the C16 version, given the technical gap between the two machines, would play out a little differently.



C16 *Kikstart* didn't actually adopt the split-screen dual mode; instead it's replaced with a single, but addictive, full-screen single bike versus clock scenario. The game has been sourced from the original C16 code, with Jason smoothing out a few of the kinks and blessing us with a brand new sprite for the bike. *Kikstart* comes packaged in some rather spiffy boxes and has been garnering some impressive feedback thus far. If you fancy bagging yourself a limited copy of the game take a trip over to www.cosine.org.uk. Now Jason, if you can only weave the same magic and get the Commodore 64 to run the excellent Commodore 128 version we'd be happy has Larry.



If you pick up a copy of *Kikstart* you'll be making Jason Kelk a very happy man, and who wouldn't want that?

CAPCOM SURFS EBAY

CLASSIC AND NOT SO CLASSIC GAMES TO GET A REBOOT

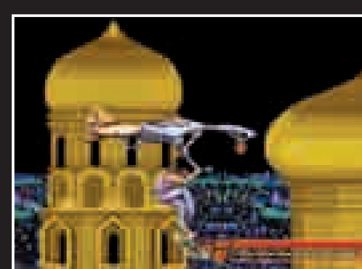
Neat little piece of news this one (well we thought so). Speaking to MTV recently, John Diamonon, an associate product manager at Capcom, revealed that the videogame giant uses eBay as a bit of a guide when considering which of its old IPs it should dust down and update.

"Sometimes we see games on eBay, and that's how you see what games people are willing to spend $80 on," said Diamonon. "To choose titles to revive, we see if we can give old franchises the modern touch, and we evaluate the fan base and see if there's a market for it."

It doesn't really seem like sound advice to us though – one person may well pay 40 quid for a copy of an old and rare game, but then there are plenty more people out there who'll happily spend 50 quid on new dross like *Bullet Witch*. Anyway, we thought we'd put the theory to the test and scoured eBay US for other Capcom games fetching high amounts of green. According to what we found (see below), *Snow Bros.* and *Little Nemo* are dead certs for a reboot.



According to eBay prices Capcom will be bringing out new versions of *Snow Bros.* and *Little Nemo*.



Snow Bros. **(NES) $54.99**
Little Nemo: The Dream Master **(NES) $54.99**
Mercs * **(Genesis) $39.99**
Captain Commando **(SNES) $29.99**
Gun Smoke **(NES) $19.99**
Knights Of The Round **(SNES) $10.50**
Strider **(Genesis) $9.41**
*Sealed

HERO OF THE MONTH



EPSILON EAGLE

Hero Of The Month
Every month, **Retro Gamer** looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Balloon Kid

First appearance: *Alien Soldier*
Weapon of choice: Phoenix Force
Most Likely to: Consistently pick fights with things bigger than him.
Least likely to: Get a remake
Unusual fact: The game never found a US release.

Retro Gamer DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

EVENT HOSTING
RETRO GAMER
IF YOU WANT **RETRO GAMER** TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we list all the exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JULY

RETRO FUSION '08

Dates: 19-20 July

Location: Leamington Rugby Club, Warwickshire

Admission: £12

Website: www.retrofusiononline.com/event08

We always enjoy our trips to Chris Wilkins' retro events, and we expect his latest to be better than ever. Taking place at a new location, and once again supporting the Everyman Campaign, Retro Fusion '08 is already on our 'to do' list. If you're a fan of retro gaming and drinking we suggest you sign up now.



AUGUST

SOUL CALIBUR

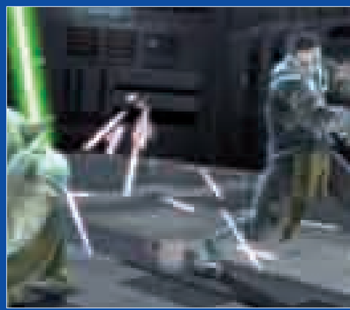
Released: August

Publisher: Namco

Price: 1,200 Points

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

The good news is that Xbox Live Arcade owners are definitely getting the superior Dreamcast version and not the arcade original. The bad news is that the excellent Quest mode is nowhere to be seen – no doubt to keep in line with Microsoft's size policy. Still, this is shaping up to be cracking fun and the fact that every single character is available from the get-go is a big plus.



AUGUST

SOUL CALIBUR IV

Released: 1 August

Publisher: Ubisoft

Price: £49.99

Format: 360, PS3

After taking a few pointers from Capcom, Ubisoft and Namco have unleashed yet another new combatant from *Soul Calibur IV*. This time it's the Apprentice from the incoming *Star Wars* game *The Force Unleashed* – although we've no idea if this is the only new addition. Still, we do know that if we don't get Princess Leia in her slave-girl outfit there's going to be hell to pay…



AUGUST

BANGAI-O SPIRITS

Released: 22 August

Publisher: D3 Enterprise

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Look at the above screenshot. Looks brilliant, doesn't it? D3 Enterprise obviously thinks so as it's decided to release Treasure's critically acclaimed DS blaster in the UK. We couldn't be more excited. With plenty of new weapons, moves, and a groovy level designer, *Bangai-O Spirits* looks like it's going to make the excellent N64 and Dreamcast games totally redundant.



SEPTEMBER

SAMBA DE AMIGO

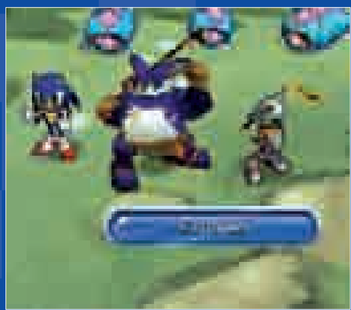
Released: September

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Hooray, another classic Dreamcast game gets given a nip and tuck for Nintendo's wonderful Wii. We're huge fans of the original maraca-shaking party game, and if Sega is able to capture the same magic with two Remotes then *Samba* could quite possibly receive the healthy sales that it has always deserved. Early reports suggest that no new songs will be included, but we'll bet our bottom dollar that you'll be able to download some.



SEPTEMBER

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

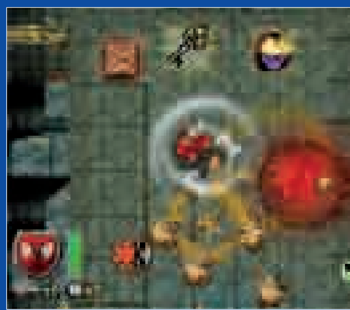
Released: September

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Apart from its silly name, we can't see how *The Dark Brotherhood* can possibly fail. It features the most popular hedgehog in the world, some gorgeous cel-styled visuals and it's being created by RPG master BioWare. Indeed, such is this developer's skill within the genre that even if it was told to create a bad game on pain of death it would simply be unable to do so.



SEPTEMBER

GAUNTLET

Released: September

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

From the moment we switched on the DS and listened to the re-jigged theme tune, *Gauntlet* had us well and truly under its spell. Using a nifty scaling technique that enables you to quickly pinpoint generators, the ability to play online, not to mention over 40 huge levels to hack and slash through, this latest addition to the very old franchise already has our interest. Expect more info in the coming months.



SEPTEMBER

R-TYPE TACTICS

Released: 26 September

Publisher: Rising Star Games

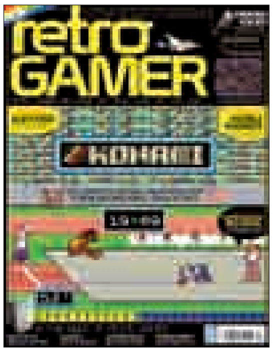
Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Now, this is bold. Irem has taken its most beloved franchise – *R-Type*, in case you didn't know – and turned it into an RTS. Worry not though, for while it sounds as sensible as adding an ashtray to a motorcycle, it's actually looking pretty damned good. There's still a while to go before its September release date, but *Tactics* is already looking like an essential addition to the franchise. Now release a proper compilation, Irem.

THE RETRO FORUM

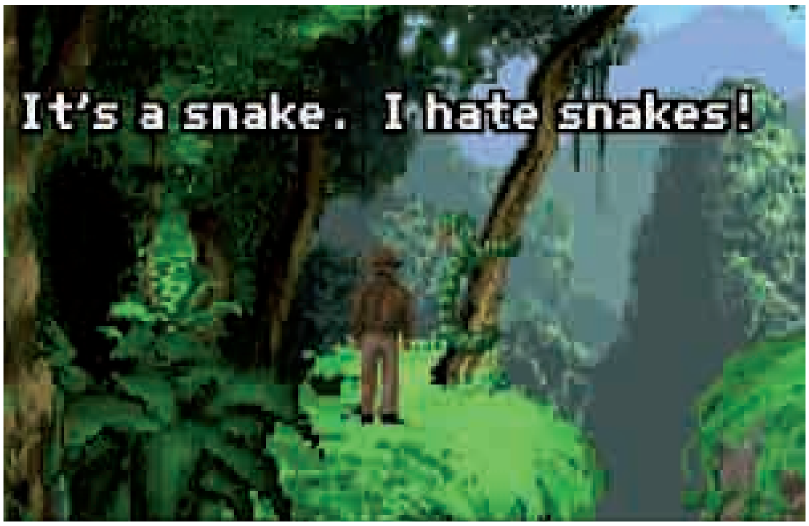
HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CONTACT US

Snail Mail
Retro Gamer
Imagine Publishing
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6EZ

Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk



» Does anyone else share Matthew Lightbourne's hatred for the amazing *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*?

LOSING THE WAY?

Dear Retro Gamer
I just wanted to say that I've been a reader of the magazine since issue one but am becoming rather concerned about the direction in which your once-fine publication is now heading.

Once upon a time, all **Retro Gamer** magazine used to cover was (quite rightly) 8-bit gaming, but I have started to notice, over the last few issues, that this trend is fast disappearing. Consoles like the PC-Engine GT and the Dreamcast are not retro machines. Franchises such as *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Might & Magic* are far too new to feature in such a magazine. And 16-bit consoles or anything after that shouldn't even get a look in – let alone actual coverage.

Retro gaming should be all about 8-bit computers, type-ins, and RAM packs. I have no interest whatsoever in reading about *Sonic*, *Contra 4* or *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*.

Please sort your magazine out or you're going to lose a long-time subscriber.

Matthew Lightbourne, London

Sorry, Matthew, but we're going to have to disagree with you here. There's still plenty of 8-bit coverage in the magazine, and while it does represent the backbone of retro gaming, it's rather harsh to state that nothing else should be covered. ***Retro Gamer*** *has a wide and diverse readership, with different tastes and different ideas of what retro gaming actually means and we have to ensure those tastes are covered. Still, this isn't the first time we've been sent a letter like this and we're sure it won't be the last.*

CARTOON HORROR

Dear Retro Gamer
I noticed in **Retro Gamer** issue 51 that you mentioned the travesty that was the *Double Dragon* cartoon series. However, you failed to mention the even more terrible *Street Fighter* cartoon? Also do you think there might be a chance of any posters in later issues of **Retro Gamer**?

Jack Brunet, Runcorn



» Jack Brunet isn't a fan of the *Street Fighter* cartoon so hopefully this classic screenshot will calm him down.

We didn't think the Street Fighter *cartoon was anywhere near as bad as the Double Dragon one. It ended up running for two series, so it must have been doing something right. As for posters, it's certainly a nice idea, but let's be honest, once you've done the Game Over poster you've pretty much hit your creative peak.*

BENEATH A STEEL CRY

Hi folks at Retro Gamer
A while ago I managed to get a copy of *Beneath A Steel Sky*, but since then I have upgraded my PC to Windows XP and I have no idea how to install the game on my new computer. Please can you help me? I keep trying but haven't had any luck so far.

Adrian Pitt, via email

Sorry, Adrian, but we've not had any joy getting our office copy to work either. Darran tried installing it on his Vista-enabled laptop to no avail. We'll try contacting Revolution Software, but in the meantime maybe you could try visiting our forum and asking for help there.



» If someone could help Adrian with his problem he'd really appreciate it.

LATE ADOPTER

Dear Retro Gamer
My name is Andre. I am 30 years old and I am from Germany. I didn't know anything about **Retro Gamer** magazine until I saw the latest issue's cover – the one with the history of *The Legend Of Zelda* – on the internet. The cover looked so beautiful that I decided



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…



there and then that I needed the issue. I'm really glad I took the plunge because the magazine is very good with lots of variety and plenty of interesting articles.

Of course, the only problem with missing out on the last 50 issues is that I've no idea if you've covered some of my favourite subjects. Therefore could you tell me if anything has ever been published in **Retro Gamer** about the following?

Have you ever featured a story about *Katakis*? This is my favourite videogame, so I would be very interested in getting my hands on any articles that might be available. If you haven't written one, could you please consider it in the future?

Finally, has **Retro Gamer** ever written an article about either *Pirates!* or Sid Meier in general? He has made so many great games in his career and it would be great to read more about him.

Thanks for making such a good magazine.

Andre Schoth, Germany

We're glad to hear that you've discovered the magazine, Andre, and welcome on board. We've not covered anything on Katakis *yet, but you're not the first person to mention this excellent shooter so who knows. We may feature it in a future issue. As for a making of* Pirates!*, however, you're in luck. It appeared in issue 38. Although it's*

From the forum

EVERY MONTH, **RETRO GAMER** ASKS A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTS THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW...
YOUR FAVOURITE KONAMI GAME?



ID: Type2XS
Metal Gear. The whole thing I mean. It's just incredible how a series could start on the humble MSX and finally get a worthy conclusion in present today.

ID: Baki
Castlevania on NES, *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* and *Symphony Of The Night*. I have played through those games multiple times and still enjoy them today. *MGS* on PlayStation is a close second. *DDR* for Dreamcast was also very enjoyable. I played that game so much I injured my foot and the doctor told me I had to rest for two weeks, I had lost 6kg which I gained again in those two weeks.

ID: ToxieDogg
Aside from a few disastrous forays into 3D, *Castlevania* remains my favourite Konami series – just don't ask me to choose one. On the SNES I also loved *TMNT IV: Turtles In Time* – the only other console scrolling beat-'em-up that was as good as *Streets Of Rage 2*, in my opinion.

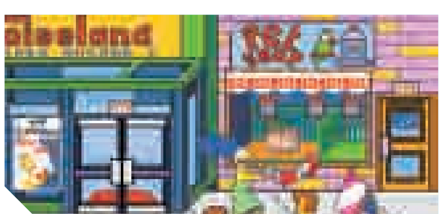
ID: chokocat
Definitely *The Simpsons* in the arcade.

ID: random_dave
Not entirely 'retro' but *Beatmania* is not only an awesome game, but it also sowed the seeds for future mass-market guitar titles. Second is the rather more retro *Yume Penguin Monogatari*. Thanks, **RG**, for bringing this madcap adventure to my attention.

ID: RetroBob
Lethal Enforcers. I played this to death. I hated accidentally killing an 'innocent victim' as even if you killed the boss you'd be demoted and have to repeat the level.

ID: TheDude18
Yie Ar Kung Fu (C64). One of the best beat-'em-ups around with some seriously over-the-top moves and characters. Pole was a right pain in the arse to beat though.

ID: Mort
Ping Pong on the Spectrum. I laughed as my brother wept when I aced him every time.



CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET





» Simon Mitchell has made an amazing looking MAME cabinet, but we'll be amazed if he can play *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* on it.

no longer available to order on back issue, you shouldn't have too much trouble getting hold of a copy.

LAME STATION

Hi Retro Gamer

After reading your article 'Who's To Blamestation' I went into my local Gamestation and they confirmed that they have indeed been destroying their stock of retro games. This should not be allowed.

Why are they destroying games when it would be a lot better to give them to local charity shops? If they did, our beloved retro games would remain in circulation. This would be a much cheaper alternative to paying for them to be destroyed, and the company would not only be seen as environmentally friendly, but also generous to charities. I hope someone from Gamestation reads this and takes note.

Paul Turner, via email

We share your pain, Paul, we really do, but you have to remember that Gamestation is, first and foremost, a business. Its purpose is not based around the preservation of games; it's in the business of making money. And if it isn't bringing home the bacon, then something has to give. A couple of stores around the UK will still be selling old classics (and we hope to have a list very soon), but if the business can recoup its money by destroying old stock then it certainly won't be giving these titles away to charity.

MAME ATTRACTION

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was very interested to see a picture of Darran's MAME cabinet in issue 51. I have been building a MAME/jukebox cabinet of my own design for the last couple of years and it's finally finished, so I thought I would show it off to you.

I actually decided to stay away from the tried-and-tested joystick design as most of my favourite arcade games don't actually use it. I went for a joystick-less design because the kind of arcade games that I enjoy – like *Hyper Sports* and *Space Invaders* – are in this format. The style of buttons also ties in with my jukebox theme.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say how much I enjoy reading the magazine and would like to know if you could incorporate a MAME feature into the magazine at some point. I'm sure there must be lots of other people who have designed and/or built their own MAME cabinets that others would like to see, so I've enclosed a picture of my own to start you off.

Simon Mitchell, Exeter

That's a great-looking cab you have there, Simon. We have just one question though. How on earth do you play Garou: Mark Of The Wolves on it?

INTERNET VS MAGAZINES

Dear Retro Gamer,

As a long-term subscriber of **Retro Gamer**, and in the light of the fantastic special fiftieth issue, I though I'd drop you guys a note to let you know what a brilliant job the team are doing. My first taste of **Retro Gamer** was issue 25 (the *Pitfall Harry* cover), which I bought on the strength of the appealing glossy cover. I've been a reader ever since, but felt compelled to track down all the previous issues since the publisher change-over. It wasn't a cheap process for me. Issue 23 (the SNES cover) cost me £16 on eBay while issue 22 (the *Renegade* cover) cost me a whopping £26.

Still, it was worth every penny. I like nothing better than lying out on the sofa with a few beers whenever latest issue drops through the letterbox. It takes me right back to when gaming began for me. I can forget all the stresses of adult life (I'm 32 now) for a short while. For me, it's what separates hard copy from the internet and why websites will never replace magazines in my eyes.

Well done and keep up the good work.

James Jessop, via email

It's no secret that the internet has been a huge influence on magazine sales in the last decade. But thankfully, because Retro Gamer is relatively niche – although we never like to admit it – it means that a lot of the content, except for the news, is packed full of the kind of features and interviews that you simply won't find on the web. Thanks for picking up the magazine each month, James.
You should have contacted us about your missing Renegade *issue though – we have a spare copy floating about somewhere and we would have gladly traded it with you for a crisp £20 note.*

» Paul Turner feels that Gamestation shouldn't be destroying copies of classic games like *Sonic The Hedgehog. Anyone agree?*



COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTION HAS A SHOOT-'EM-UP THEME. SEE IF YOU CAN TAKE A GUESS AS TO WHY DARRAN WAS SO INSISTENT ON COVERING THOMAS HOEGAR'S IMPRESSIVE HAUL



» Thomas Hoegar hails from Vienna, Austria and is 28 years old. When he's not hiding behind his consoles, he likes to play lots and lots of shoot-'em-ups. Good man.



» "The PS2 received many great shooters. It also has loads of great Cave shooters, so it's a great system if you're into the bullet hell genre."





» "The PC-Engine Duo was a long-time dream for me, but somehow I never managed to get around to buying one. Then my wonderful wife bought me one as a wedding present, which came as a total surprise. That's love."





» "A small selection of my favourite shooter soundtracks. In front you can see mini replicas of classic ships from games like *R-Type*, *Gradius*, and *Image Fight*. These gashapons were released several months ago in Japan."



» "The Dreamcast may have failed commercially, but it's home to many great exclusive arcade ports like the excellent *Border Down*, and *Under Defeat*, which I still feel has the best graphics ever seen in a shooter."



» "My special love for shoot-'em-ups began with the Mega Drive, as it was the perfect console for action games – which I loved. Many great shmups, like *Gley Lancer* or *Elemental Master*, remained exclusive to Japan, so I decided to buy a Japanese Mega Drive in addition to my PAL machine."



» "When my friends abandoned two-dimensional gaming due to the arrival of 32-bit consoles, I stayed loyal to my local importer. Games like *DoDonPachi* and *Radiant Silvergun* were certainly worth the extra cost to me."







» "Here are a few shots of my self-made arcade cabinet. It houses a Supergun and numerous PCBs but has also been modified to play all console Tate shooters. The artwork on the left side is from the excellent Cave shooter *DoDonPachi Daioujou*."

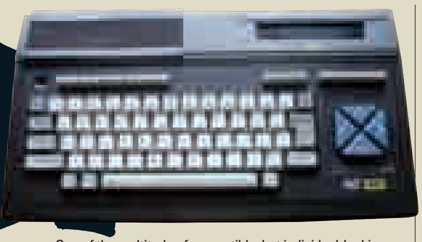
If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1984



SEPTEMBER 1984 – Commodore Duff/4, MSX galore, Strontium Dog marks its territory, Ghostbusters looks good, Automan looks bad, JSW is edited and Chiller's Thriller gets an icy reception. Richard Burton moonwalks back to 1984…



» One of the multitude of compatible, but individual-looking, MSX machines trying to knock the Spectrum off its perch.

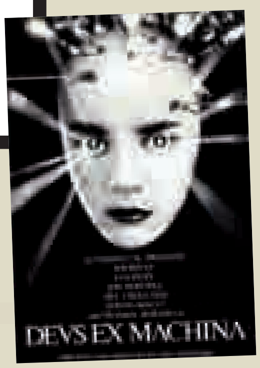
Commodore's newest system, the Plus/4, had a difficult start when manufacturing glitches limited the availability of the machine. The four built-in ROM programs weren't quite ready, resulting in it not being available until October and then not in any significant numbers.

The C16 was faring better with Commodore confirming that it would definitely supersede the VIC-20 whose production would be stopping immediately.

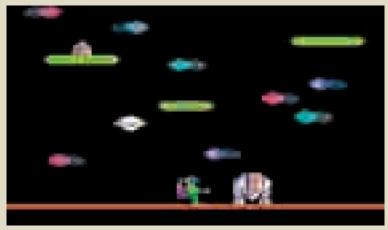
The long-suffering Aquarius 1 looked doomed after further price cuts. Now just £49.95, it would be competing against the ZX81. Considering that machine was being phased out after three years service spoke volumes about the Aquarius as a machine.

The MSX computer system was finally launched. Seven companies released machines and they read like a who's who of electronics companies; Sony, Toshiba, Canon, Hitachi, JVC, Sanyo and Mitsubishi. The machines would cost about £280 each.

This partnership also revealed they had over 50 software houses signed up to release MSX software. With compatibility issues solved, seemingly good-spec machines and the promise of a substantial software base, the MSX really should've been a success in the UK.



» *Deus Ex Machina* (Spectrum): Automata's ambitious attempt at creating a new gaming experience worked to a certain extent. It just sold rather badly.



» *Jetpac* (BBC): The top-selling Spectrum blaster gets converted to the BBC. It played great and looked colourful.

Mel Croucher's software house, Automata, was ready to release its ground-breaking new game, *Deus Ex Machina*. The game, to quote Automata, "is intended as a totally original audio-visual entertainment, in which the 'player' actively takes part in a televised fantasy, fully synchronised to a stereo soundtrack".

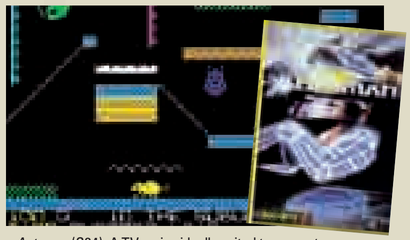
With famous names contributing, such as ex-*Doctor Who* Jon Pertwee, Ian Dury and Frankie Howerd, with music supplied by Mr Croucher and jazz singer Donna Bailey, it was certainly ambitious, not unlike the game, which saw you control life from conception to death.

Sadly, the unwillingness of distributors to take it on at the £15 price tag resigned the game to poor sales and a small audience.

Ultimate announced two new games for the Spectrum, *Underwurlde* and *Knight Lore*, with both featuring Ultimate's hero, Sabreman. *Knight Lore*, using Ultimate's new Filmation graphics engine, would get gamers and programmers alike rubbing their eyeballs in disbelief at what Ultimate could do with a 48K Spectrum. There was also good news for BBC Micro owners as a conversion of *Jetpac* was released for their system.



» *Knight Lore* (Spectrum): Arguably Ultimate's finest hour, *Knight Lore* stuns everyone on release.



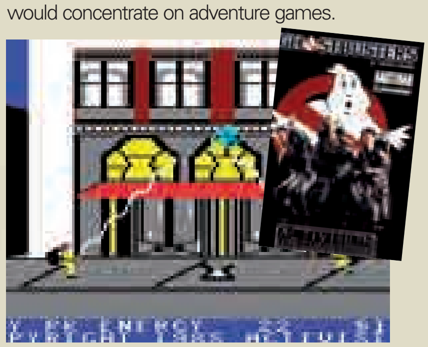
» *Automan* (C64): A TV series ideally suited to computer games and still the finished article was complete and utter pap.

Quicksilva also had a range of new releases. Included in its roster for the Christmas sales push were two *2000AD* tie-in games. *Strontium Dog – The Killing* and *Strontium Dog – The Death Gauntlet* would be released on Spectrum and C64 respectively.

It also released *Blood 'N Guts*, which found you travelling around the inside of a human body. Sound familiar? It should, as it was later renamed *Fantastic Voyage* after a belated licensing agreement with 20th Century Fox for the Sixties sci-fi movie starring Raquel Welch.

Mastertronic unveiled its latest creation, *Chiller*, a platform game loosely based on the Michael Jackson song, *Thriller*. Written by Richard and David Darling, the game created a rumpus after copyright issues regarding the music used on the C64 version which, unsurprisingly, bore a resemblance to Mr Jackson's *Thriller* track. Mastertronic back-peddled furiously and re-released the game with a different tune. However, the original version crept into shops in limited numbers.

Mastertronic also revealed it would be adding a sub-label, called Mastervision, that would concentrate on adventure games.



» *Ghostbusters* (Amstrad): Chase ghosts, lay traps and stop the Gatekeeper and Keymaster getting to the Temple of Zuul.

1984

SEPTEMBER NEWS

On 26 September UK and China finalise a draft agreement for the UK to hand back control of Hong Kong to China after 150 years of UK rule. However, the eventual date of handover would be 1 July 1997.

On 5 September the Space Shuttle Discovery lands at Edwards Air Force Base in California on its inaugural flight. It launched on 30 August with its mission to deploy three new satellites.

Prince Harry, second son of Charles and Diana, was born on 15 September. Apparently, Henry Charles Albert David Mountbatten-Windsor, to give him his full name, is keen on beer. Long live the King!

The Miners' Strike was declared illegal on 28 September as members of the National Union of Mineworkers had not been balloted after Arthur Scargill called for strike action after several mines were closed with over 20,000 job losses. Scargill described the verdict as "irrelevant", while miners, from Yorkshire and Derbyshire, who had originally disputed the strike, said they'd return to work.

Receiving its world premiere on 9 September was *Amadeus*, the story of Mozart. In typical Hollywood style the poster read, "The man, the music, the magic, the madness, the murder, the mystery, the motion picture." However, the film made no mention of his musical contribution to *Dynamite Dan* on the Speccy.



» The film won the Best Use Of Classical Music In A Platform Game in the Spectrum category… sort of…


» Tasks on Space Shuttle Discovery's maiden voyage included boning up on *Manic Miner*.



» JSW Editor (Spectrum): The start of a beautiful friendship between *JSW* and editing programs and a whole new sub-genre.

However, it wouldn't be getting things all its own way in the budget markets for much longer. British Telecom unveiled plans to release its own budget-priced games, starting in October, with an assortment of 20 titles for various machines. They would be published under the name of Firebird and cost £2.50.

Bug-Byte secured its first licensing agreement when it bought the rights to the TV show, *Automan*. The game was released on the C64 with a promised Spectrum version never materialising. A lucky escape for Speccy owners as it proved to be a right old stinker.

With *Ghostbusters* due for release in UK cinemas in December, it wasn't a surprise to hear someone had bagged the rights to the game. Activision announced it was releasing its *Ghostbusters* game in November. It had been written by David Crane, *Pitfall*'s programmer, who was also working on a *Pitfall* sequel for the Atari 2600. Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Atari 2600 and new MSX owners (all four of them) would have to pay around £10 for the privilege of laying ghost bait, firing proton streams and defeating Stay Puft Marshmallow Man.

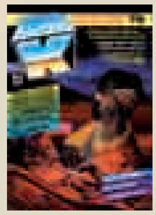
With *Jet Set Willy* still selling well, a utility program released by Softricks capitalised on its popularity and unwittingly created a phenomenon in the process. Softricks began placing its small classified ad in the back of various computer mags for its JSW Editor. For £3.50 you would get a program that would let you redesign the rooms in Willy's mansion and edit the sprites, so you could create completely new games. The program was simple to use and gamers were suddenly producing an abundance of new Willy worlds… and still are…

In a quiet month for quality Speccy games, *Crash* decided that *Black Hawk* (Creative Sparks) and *The Hulk* (Adventure International) were the only titles worthy of a Crash Smash.

C&VG gave the Game of the Month award to *Match Point* (Psion, Spectrum). There was a smorgasbord of gaming delights from the highly rated also-rans, such as *Full Throttle* (Micromega, Spectrum), *Duellin' Droid* (English Software, Atari XL), *Hi Bouncer* (Mirrorsoft, BBC) and *Danger Mouse In Double Trouble* (Creative Sparks, C64) doing particularly well.

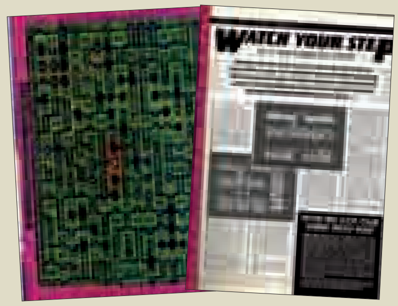

» *Chiller* (C64): *Chiller* plus *Thriller* equals sales killer. Still, the copyright problems worked wonders for its notoriety and profits.

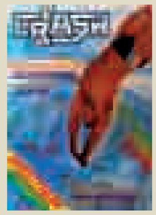
THIS MONTH IN…



BIG K

With *Sabre Wulf* wowing everyone owning a Spectrum, *Big K* reviewed the game and featured a map of the entire landscape sent in by a reader. It was surely the first map published they thought? Nope. Virtually every other computer games magazine ran a *Sabre Wulf* map with a players guide.

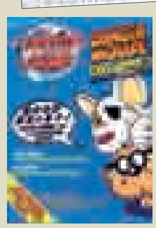




CRASH

Gargoyle Games' newest game was getting previewed by *Crash* and it was causing quite a buzz. *Tir Na Nog*, a graphical adventure par excellence, featured your character, Cuchulainn, striding around a beautiful landscape in search of the Seal of Calum. Superb, yet brick hard.





COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES

It was again time for *C&VG*'s annual Arcade Championship Finals, won previously by Julian Rignall. Four games were chosen to be part of the finals: *Star Wars*, *Gyruss*, *Track & Field* and *Dragon's Lair*, with the winner in each game taking part in a mystery play-off… Rignall was there again…



CHARTS

SEPT 1984



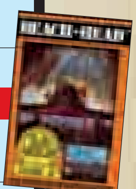
MUSIC

1. I Just Called To Say I Love You (Stevie Wonder)
2. Careless Whisper (George Michael)
3. Agadoo (Black Lace)
4. Ghostbusters (Ray Parker Jnr)
5. Dr Beat (Miami Sound Machine)



SPECTRUM

1. Sabre Wulf (Ultimate)
2. Jet Set Willy (Software Projects)
3. Mugsy (Melbourne House)
4. Tornado Low Level (Vortex)
5. Psytron (Beyond)



COMMODORE 64

1. Beach Head (US Gold)
2. Valhalla (Legend)
3. Aztec Challenge (US Gold)
4. Arabian Nights (Interceptor Software)
5. International Soccer (Commodore)

BBC

1. Fortress (Pace Software)
2. Chuckie Egg (A&F Software)
3. Blagger (Alligata)
4. Aviator (Acornsoft)
5. Ghouls (Micro Power)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1990



DECEMBER 1990 – Game Gear arrives, Perry leaves, Sega's TeraDrive announced, Amstrad's GX4000 gets some software, Commodore reveals the Amiga A1500, while Ocean Software gets terminated. Richard Burton dons his Santa suit and stuffs his face with mince pies…



» The newest addition to the Amiga family was the A1500. Aimed at serious users and gamers, it was a UK-only release.

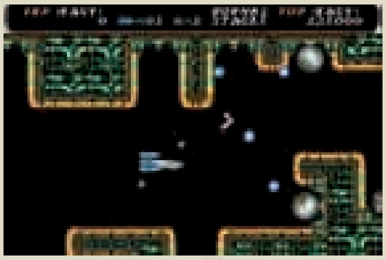
Those Japanese gamers were getting spoilt something rotten this Christmas. With the recent release of the Nintendo Famicom console, they now also had the official launch of Sega's handheld console, the Game Gear.

Priced in Japan at 20,000 yen (about £79) and with games costing around £14, the pricing structure looked very attractive compared to some of the existing machines, such as Atari's Lynx weighing in at £180 and the PC-Engine GT at a pricey £250.

With Sega's impressive back catalogue of games the future looked to be bright for the Game Gear. There were three games available at launch for the system; *Columns*, *Pengo* and *Super Monaco* with *G-LOC* and Wonder Boy available shortly afterwards.

Unfortunately, the early signs didn't bode well. Reliability problems, short battery life and the fact that the all-conquering Game Boy couldn't be ousted from top spot, severely hampered any chances of the Game Gear making an impact on the Japanese gaming scene.

So you want to play *Kid Chameleon* on your Mega Drive while sorting out your business accounts? You're in luck. Sega revealed plans to release an amalgamation of a 286 PC with a Mega Drive, although no time frame for release was stated.

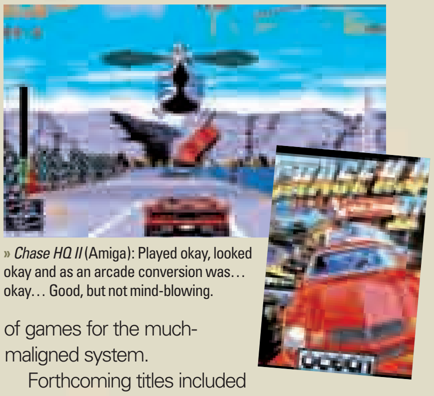


» *Hellfire* (Mega Drive): An exceptional shoot-'em-up featuring great graphics and a really testing learning curve.

The combo machine eventually appeared in May 1991 and was called the Sega TeraDrive. However, there was good and bad news. The good news was that it would come with a software development kit allowing PC and Mega Drive to interact. Essentially you could develop your own Mega Drive games. The bad news was that it would only be released in Japan. Man, I'm moving to Tokyo…

Sega would later grant Amstrad a licence to release its own version of the TeraDrive called the MegaPC. By the time it hit the shops in 1993 the PC was woefully out of date and made barely any impact with gamers or PC owners. It also couldn't act as a development machine as the PC and the Mega Drive were separate entities, albeit in one case, with no interaction between the two systems. Oh, and it cost a whopping £1,000. Ouch.

However, Amstrad would be hoping for a better outcome with its new GX4000 console. With one eye on Christmas and your disposable income, it announced an avalanche of games for the much-maligned system.



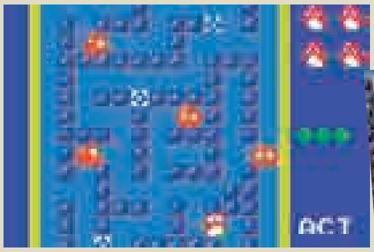
» *Chase HQ II* (Amiga): Played okay, looked okay and as an arcade conversion was… okay… Good, but not mind-blowing.

Forthcoming titles included *Barbarian II*, *Batman* and *Navy Seals*, all made by Ocean. There would also be *Klax* from Domark, *Switchblade* from Gremlin and *Pro Tennis Tour* by Ubisoft. As it turned out, those releases accounted for about a fifth of all the games ever officially released on the console.

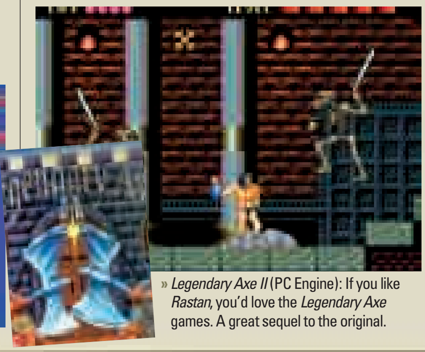
Amstrad stalwart, Roland Perry, technical manager and namesake to several Amsoft games, announced he'd left Amstrad to set up his own business. He'd been involved in developing the original CPC range and had also had a hand in the CPC Plus series.

Commodore revealed its latest incarnation of the Amiga, the A1500, a middle-ground machine for serious users and gamers alike. The system would come with an impressive package including some top-notch software including *Their Finest Hour* and Deluxe Paint III, as well as a rather swanky colour monitor with stereo sound. That said, you would only have enough change left for a couple of bags of Monster Munch from your £1,000 outlay.

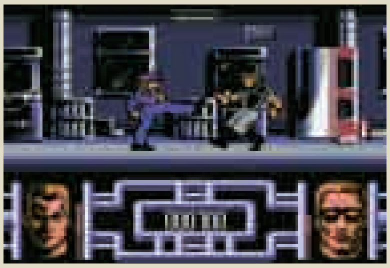
Ocean proudly announced it had acquired the licence to one of the most anticipated



» *Pengo* (Game Gear): One of the first games released on the new handheld, which didn't do much to showcase it at all.



» *Legendary Axe II* (PC Engine): If you like *Rastan*, you'd love the *Legendary Axe* games. A great sequel to the original.



» *Terminator 2* (C64): One of Ocean's better movie tie-ins, which was later given away as part of a C64 bundle package.

1990

DECEMBER NEWS



» After several years in hiding, Salman Rushdie adopted a cunning disguise when going out in public.

On 3 December Mary Robinson began her first term as the first female President of Ireland. Running as the Labour candidate she beat rival Brian Lenihan of the Fianna Fail party in what many considered a shock, as no Fianna Fail candidate had ever lost a presidential election before.

There was more Presidential voting in Poland on 10 December, where one time mechanic and shipyard shop steward Lech Walesa was voted in as President of the Republic of Poland, a position he held for five years.

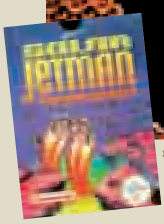
Old rocker Rod Stewart married model Rachel Hunter on 15 December. Rod was 45 and Miss Hunter was 21 years old. It must've been the leopard-skin spandex that caught her eye…

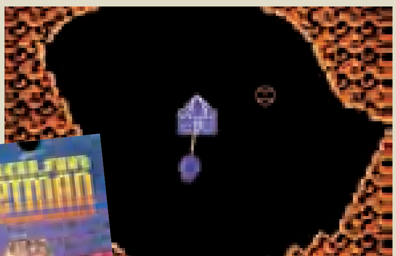


» Lech Walesa, new President of Poland, loved a rousing rally for the Warsaw division of *Retro Gamers*.

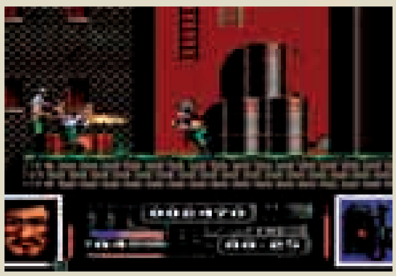
26 December saw the fatwa handed out to Salman Rushdie for comments in his book *The Satanic Verses*. Iran's spiritual leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated that the death sentence passed on him almost two years ago should not be removed.

Eight years later the Iranian government said it would not carry out the death sentence on Mr Rushdie. This led to him making more public appearances, having spent almost all his time in hiding since the fatwa was decreed. However, Iranian hardliners continue to ask for the death of the author.





» *Solar Jetman* (NES): *Jetman* makes his comeback, thanks to Rare/Ultimate, in this cracking *Thrust*-like game on the NES.



» *Navy Seals* (Amstrad GX4000): One of very few releases on the console, *Navy Seals* actually turned out rather well.

sequels of recent years, that of the forthcoming *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* film. With it opening in cinemas around summer 1991, the game was due to follow within three months, according to Ocean. I need your clothes, your boots and your books on machine-code programming… let's hope not…

Racing games seemed to be flavour of the month with a varied bunch for gamers to create a few skid marks with. *Test Drive III* for the PC saw more of the same from Accolade, while Gremlin's *Team Suzuki* preferred to race on two wheels rather than four with its 500cc motorbike racer for Amiga and ST owners.

Ocean went over old ground with *Chase HQ II: Special Criminal Investigation*. It was developed for Ocean by International Computer Entertainment (ICE), who previously worked on the average *Turbo OutRun* on the Amiga.



» *Test Drive III* (PC): Nice looking, but it's so frustratingly hard to control the cars at anything approaching a meaningful speed.

Although ICE developed the excellent Amiga version of *The New Zealand Story*, it never seemed able to successfully create a decent racing game and *Chase HQ II* was another mediocre effort. Future ICE-developed Amiga racers included *Cisco Heat* for Mirrorsoft and *Hydra* for Domark. A pattern was emerging…

Another new release was *Car-Vup* from Core Design for the Amiga and ST. The game was more of a platformer than a bona fide racer. It turned out to be cutesy and colourful with a whiff of *Rainbow Islands* about it. It was high in novelty factor with a quirky feel but once that had worn off it became old really fast.

C&VG awarded C&VG Hit status to *Strider* (Sega, Mega Drive), *James Pond* (Millennium, Amiga), *Powermonger* (EA, Amiga), *F1 Circus* (Nichibutsu, PC-Engine), *Spider-Man* (Empire, Amiga), *The Secret Of Monkey Island* (Lucasfilm, PC), *Battle Command* (Ocean, Amiga), *Legendary Axe II* (Victor Musical, PC-Engine) and *Hellfire* (Toaplan, Mega Drive).

Mean Machines gave Mega Game status to *John Madden's Football* (EA, Mega Drive), *Solar Jetman* (Rare, SNES), *Super Monaco GP* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Hellfire* (Toaplan, Mega Drive) and *Pang* (Ocean, Amstrad GX4000). Yes, you read that right, GX4000…

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

MEAN MACHINES



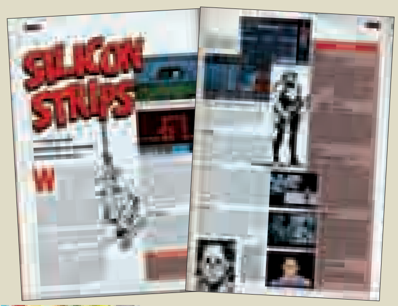
One of *Mean Machines* Mega Games this month was *Solar Jetman* from Rare. It did very well on the NES but all other versions appeared to have been lost. The Commodore 64 version did resurface thanks to Haydn Dalton, the original graphics artist, but the Spectrum version is yet to be found. Anyone?



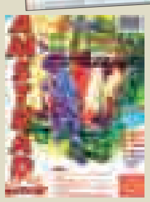
ACE



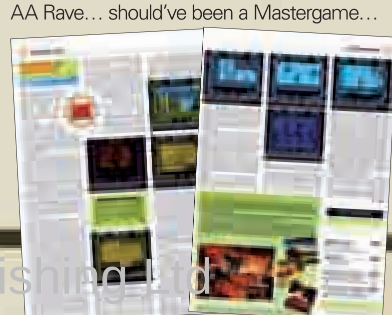
ACE highlighted the growing trend of superhero games and looked into how developers transfer a comic book into a game, while keeping the look and feel of the original character without losing the narrative of the storyline. Under observation were *Judge Dredd* and *Spider-Man*.



AMSTRAD ACTION



It might be the era of the 16-bitters, but all three of the main 8-bit machines were still going strong(ish) and all still had dedicated magazines covering their system with some excellent software still being produced. Case in point, *Shadow Of The Beast* by Psygnosis, given an AA Rave… should've been a Mastergame…

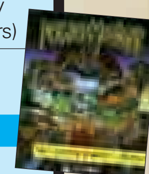


DECEMBER 1990



MUSIC

1. Ice Ice Baby (Vanilla Ice)
2. Saviour's Day (Cliff Richard)
3. Justify My Love (Madonna)
4. Unchained Melody (Righteous Brothers)
5. All Together Now (The Farm)



ATARI ST

1. Powermonger (Electronics Arts)
2. Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles (Mirrorsoft)
3. Corporation (Core Design)
4. Wonderland (Magnetic Scrolls)
5. Supremacy (Virgin)

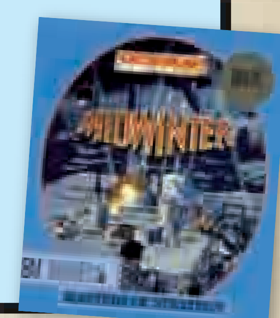


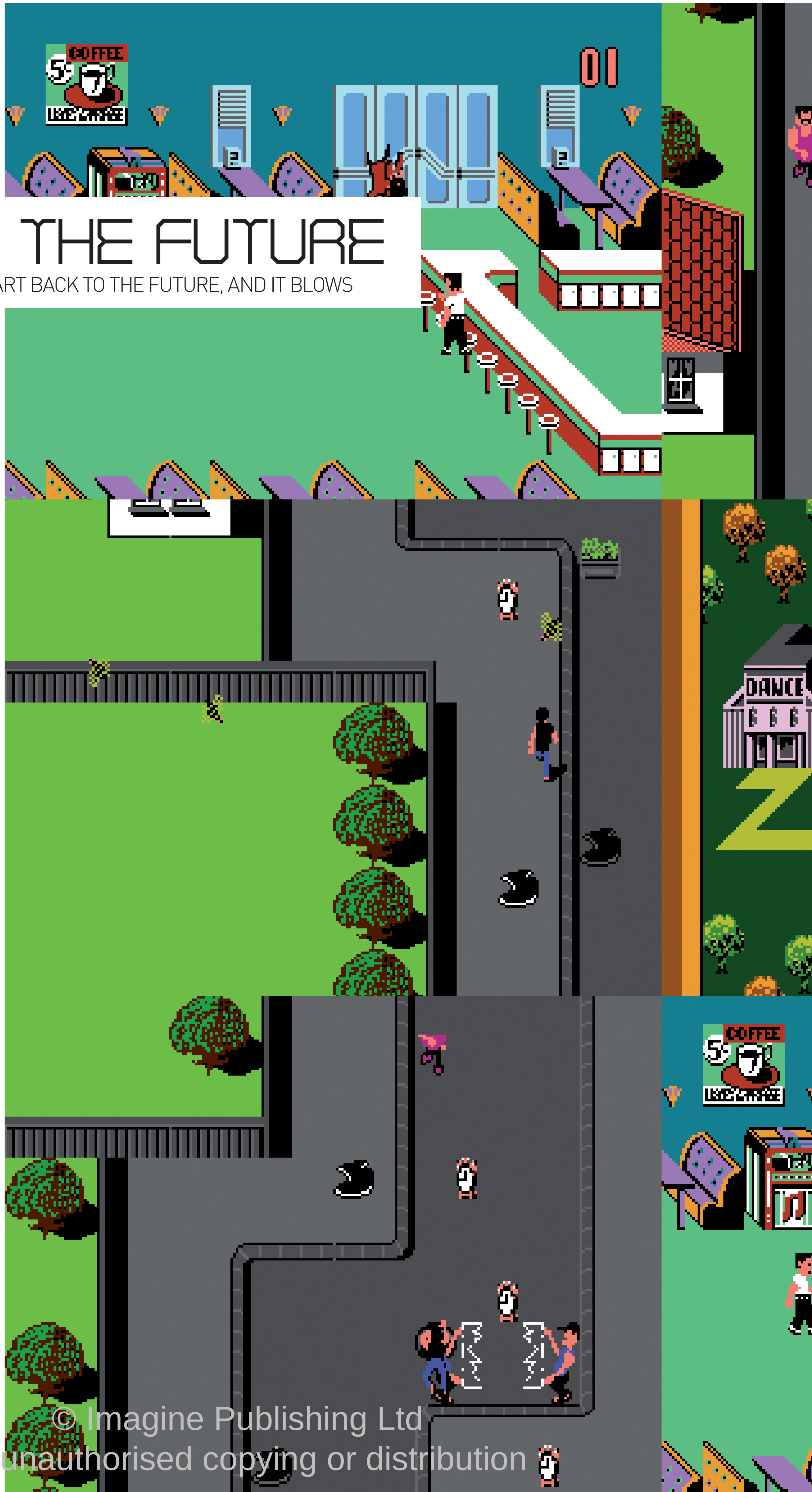
AMIGA

1. F-19 Stealth Fighter (Microprose)
2. Powermonger (Electronic Arts)
3. Wonderland (Magnetic Scrolls)
4. Supremacy (Virgin)
5. The Immortal (Electronic Arts)

PC

1. Midwinter (Microprose/Rainbird)
2. Wonderland (Magnetic Scrolls)
3. Silent Service II (Microprose)
4. Star Control (Accolade)
5. Elvira (Accolade)





BACK TO THE FUTURE

LJN REPEATEDLY SENDS STUART BACK TO THE FUTURE, AND IT BLOWS



- **PUBLISHER:** LJN
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** WALK-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** TOO MUCH



HISTORY

This game sucks, I hate it. Of all the NES cartridges that I've owned, this crummy, miserable, little waste of a perfectly brilliant licence is pure hatred wrapped in a grey plastic jacket.

I can remember vividly the utter disbelief I felt after finally laying my hands on this game, only to be rewarded for my troubles by having all my senses felt up inappropriately. Here is a game that took artistic licence to all-new levels of shamefulness, and begs that common LJN question that I continually find myself asking: did anybody at the company actually take the time to watch any of the movies?

Back To The Future is a walk-'em-up, essentially a dire version of *Paperboy*, but without the bike… or *Skate Or Die* with more emphasis on the dying. In the movie, Marty McFly gets stuck in 1955 and has to stop his mother from trying to sleep with him. In the game, it's about a guy in a black Active T-shirt repeatedly walking down a street.

In the film, Marty gets to drive a Delorean and cover greasers in horse waste. In the game, he has to avoid the deathly touch of Hula-Hoop girls, removal men with OCD, and gigantic killer wasps, while all the time collecting alarm clocks off the floor.

Park benches, kerbs and oil spills resembling Pac-Man; basically everything in this ridiculous version of Hill Valley seems determined to kill Marty and ruin his life.

If you can get him past the first few levels of street obstacles, the game then changes to a more familiar film setting: Lou's Café. It's here Marty has to stand behind a counter and lob crushed cans at approaching bullies. If you fail to clear this agonisingly twitchy level, you get sent back one whole stage, which is the most infuriating thing you can imagine – you lose a life and then you potentially have to lose another to get back to where you were in the first place. This game really should have been renamed from *Back To The Future* to '*Back To The Previous Annoying Level*'.

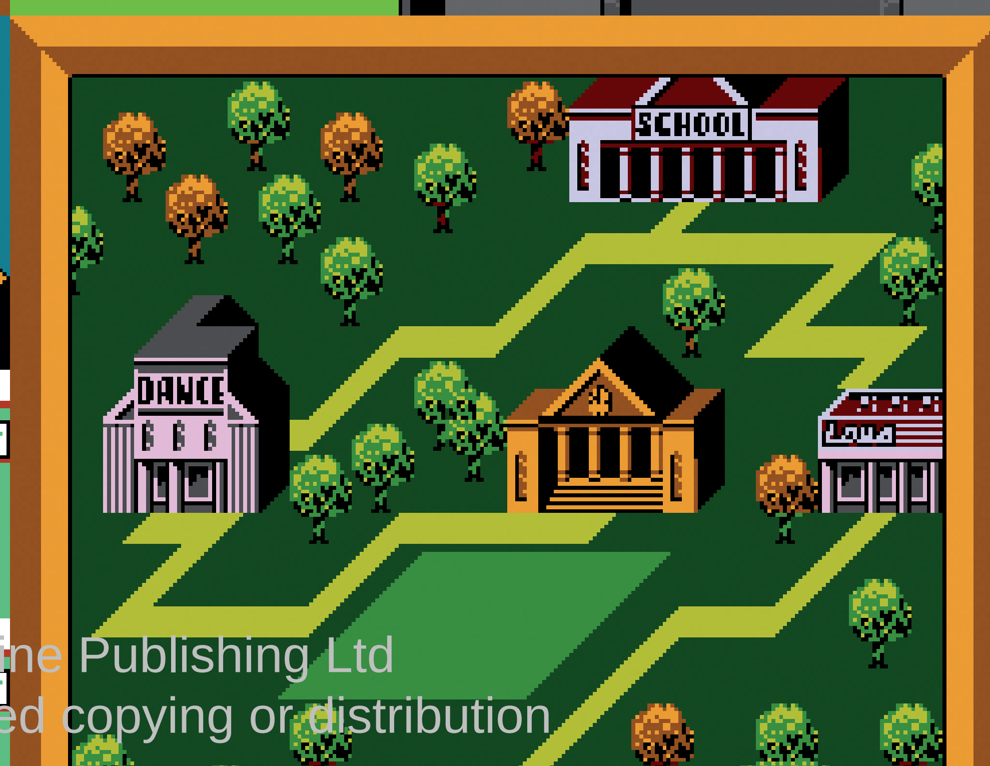





SCHOOL
Lou's
HILL VALLEY




00


SCHOOL
DANCE
Lou's

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

IT CREATED GENRES AND SHAPED THE WAY THAT WE PLAYED GAMES IN ARCADES, CASINOS, FITNESS CLUBS AND AT HOME. TIMES CHANGE AND SO DOES KONAMI, AND THAT'S WHAT SETS IT APART FROM ITS CONTEMPORARIES. MIKE TOOLEY TAKES A LOOK AT THE ONE VIDEOGAME FOREFATHER THAT JUST CAN'T STOP PIONEERING

Konami (PART 1)



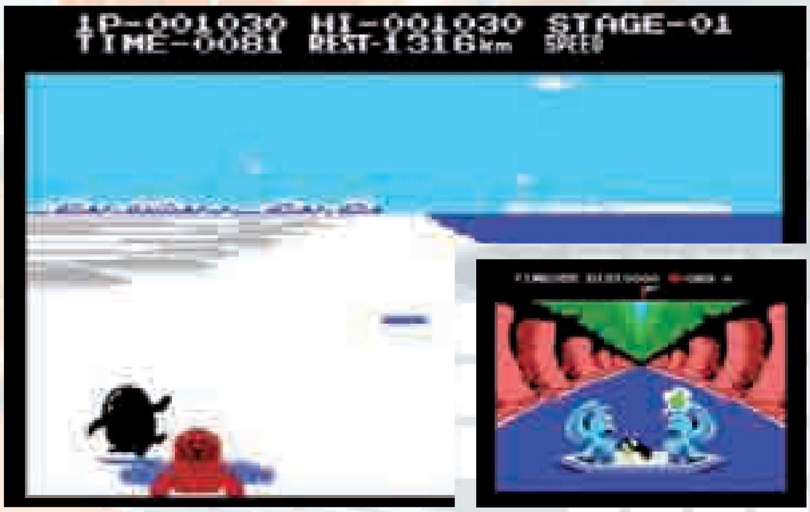
Some might argue that Konami doesn't release much these days; these people would, of course, be wrong. For while most game publishers court publicity at every turn, publishing many versions of one game, and therefore giving an impression of grandiose scale, Konami is content with low-key advertising, knowing that it's delivering solid titles honed for each format. You would have to own many systems to get a real feel for Konami and all of its games, and it makes no apologies for that either. Its games are coveted and anticipated by gamers in a way reminiscent of the late 16-bit and early 32-bit era, where new releases were often hallmarked by new features and technologies. You only have to look at any *Pro Evo* release and the recently released *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* to realise this.

The early Konami showed the facets of what Konami would become, but Darwin himself would have struggled to plot the evolutionary path that it eventually followed. Founded in 1969 by Kagemasa Kozuki, its original incarnation, Leijac Corporation rented and maintained jukeboxes to Japan's then rapidly expanding leisure establishments. Based in Osaka, the company eventually expanded and for a short time even licensed music tracks to be played exclusively in its machines.

As the Sixties gave way to the Seventies, music was changing, Japan was opening up to Western influences and the accessibility of airwaves led to many establishments moving away from jukeboxes in favour



Rare, if you have one of these it's worth an absolute fortune.



Antartic Adventure's Penta is Pentarou's father. Rumours persist however that he's the same bird that appears in Sega's *Pengo*.

KONAMI INSTANT EXPERT

After the disappointing showing of *Haunted Castle* in the arcade, Konami not only released *Simon's Quest* the following year, but it added *Castlevania* levels and characters to *Konami World* on the NES by way of an apology.

Konami created Frogger but it appeared almost everywhere with the Sega logo. Sega thought it owned the rights and indeed licensed the game to Parker Brothers, who cordially converted the game baring the Sega logo. Two court hearings to date have taken place and ownership continues to remain unresolved, with the two now having an unspoken agreement on the title.

Konami wasn't averse to using famous film stars to help sell its games. If you look at the box art of *Metal Gear*, Solid Snake looks remarkably similar to a certain Michael Biehn.

When Scramble was released Konami neglected to protect the hardware and software, this led to many companies releasing the game as their own. Bizarrely, it was Stern who prosecuted most of the companies involved and it was also awarded the patent for *Scramble*'s moving images.

In the UK, Konami conversions were handled by Imagine Software, the quality of the 8-bit versions shone when compared to Konami's own bare bones NES releases.

Konami became famous for its cheat codes in the late-Eighties with Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A working on almost all of the company's games. Where did it come from? Kazuhisa Hashimoto, who programmed the Famicom *Nemesis* explains: "The arcade version of *Gradius* is really difficult. I never played it that much, and there was no way I could finish the game, so I inserted the so-called Konami code."

Konami's first licensed game was based on dolls, *Cabbage Patch Kids*. Its first movie licence was the lamentable *Goonies*; but this almost didn't get released as it was caught in the turmoil surrounding the film's release.

Without Konami, EA would not have published on the NES. Trip Hawkins refused to agree to Nintendo's terms, so Konami distributed and occasionally converted EA games to the system, which is why games like *Skate or Die!* have Konami's details if you're downloading them from the Wii's Virtual Console service.

More units were sold and more money was made from the *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* machine than any other arcade machine in the Eighties.

Konami has never released a game on a launch day of any console.

of piped music. Kozuki needed to adapt. With the help of his business partners Yoshinobu Nakama, Hiro Matsuda and Shokichi Ishihara, the company moved into amusement machines catering to the same leisure market with new technologies such as the then primitive pachinko machines and pintables.

In 1973 they founded Konami Industry Co, Ltd for 1 million yen. The new company would take its name from an amalgamation of the partners' names, with the literal translation being 'small wave'. The new Konami relocated to 124-1 Meishinguchi, Toyonaka, Osaka; an industrial complex on the edge of the city. From there it would start to manufacture amusement machines under licence, while Matsuda and Ishihara founded Konami's first R&D division, looking at the use of microprocessors in amusement machines. Kozuki meanwhile was becoming enamoured with Nolan Bushnell's *Pong*. He had seen *Space War* on one of his frequent trips to the US, but knew from his own experience that if you were going to sell to the mainstream, the product had to be accessible to the mainstream. With *Pong* it seemed that Bushnell had achieved this. The company made haste and in 1974 released a primitive maze game locally. *Maze* was created on a simple arcade board that Konami's research team had put together and involved moving an oscillating block to the centre of a maze. Returns weren't exceptional, but were healthy enough to reinforce Kozuki's belief that arcade videogames were the next big thing. The board was slightly improved and three new games were released over the following two years. *Block Game*, *Block Invader* and *Space Ship* were three very basic games that all lacked the magic of *Pong*. Despite this, all three showed a moderate return that validated Konami's endeavour.

In late 1978 Taito would release *Space Invaders* and the world of videogames would change forever. Kozuki bought a machine and reverse engineered it, the hardware it ran on was simple, but Konami would struggle to replicate its own version quickly, so instead licensed the Taito 8080 board. By 1979 it had released three more games – *Space King*, *Space King 2* and *Space War* – to a limited Japanese market and smaller test market in the US. While *Space King* and its sequel were *Space Invaders* clones, *Space War* was an innovative two-player affair that saw players competing with each other to shoot down the most enemies. The protagonists were reminiscent of *Star Wars* craft, and gameplay was balanced in such a way that a two-player game created the same tensions and emotions as *Pong*. Konami had finally found what it was looking for.

Kozuki, however, felt that Konami was losing ground on the competition. Taito got it right with its second game, while it had taken seven games for Konami to acquire even moderate success.

A board meeting was hastily arranged in April 1979. At the meeting it was agreed that Konami shouldn't licence technologies in the future, but should instead create its own, therefore allowing the company to stay ahead of the competition. It was also decided here that Konami would need to expand the market it operated in. Until this point, Konami games were rarely seen outside of Osaka.

While Kozuki and Nakama looked at new markets and explored licensing deals – which would see Konami's games reach all of Japan, the United States and Europe – Konami's R&D department worked tirelessly on a new arcade board that was to be better than anything else that was on the market at the time.

Initially, it remodelled the 8080 board, adapting it with a Z80 processor, which was first seen in the Eighties *Astro Invader* game. Although it was an improvement, it was nothing like the design that the Konami board had anticipated.

Adding pressure to the R&D team at the time was a group of programmers who had grown in confidence with each release, now their demands were in advance of



The first Konami game for the Game Boy.

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Kagemasa Kozuki

Konami's founder is a revelation in the games industry. Unlike his peers he didn't receive a corporation as a birth right. His passions paint a diverse collage of interests and it is difficult to understand what drives him.

Starting out renting and repairing jukeboxes, Kozuki had a passion for the industry at large. At heart he was a sportsman, and from his share of the *Scramble* profits and with local government assistance, in 1982, he created the Kozuki Foundation, and to this day he's contributed to promote and develop sports, educational and cultural-related activities. The foundation supports sports athletes and instructors representing Japan.

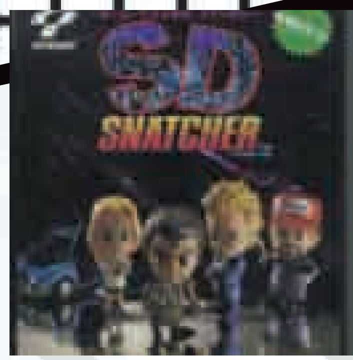
The Kozuki Sports Award in Japan is as prestigious as a gold medal, and is given to sports athletes representing Japan who have achieved outstanding results in Olympic Games, World Championships, or other equivalent athletic meetings. He was even part of the J League rejuvenation of the early Nineties that brought the likes of Gary Lineker to Japan.

With Konami's rapid expansion into health fitness and casinos across the world, Kozuki has proved that he is a true empire builder. The roots of *Track & Field* have many similarities with the roots of Electronic Art's *Madden* – one man's folly on which an empire was built.





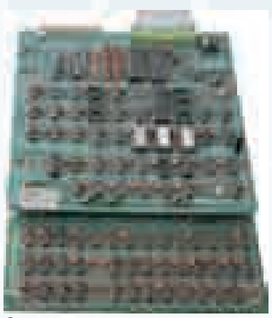
Part of the *Snatcher* design document.



These toys, that starred on the cover art, were made in limited quantities for the Japanese market.



Konami wasn't worried about branding. It's easy to see why gamers didn't know about it; it didn't take long to change that though.



The Scramble hardware that sent Konami into the big league.



Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles would be the biggest-selling arcade of the Eighties.

the capabilities of the technology available to them, as Kozuki explained during an interview with *RePlay* magazine in the mid-Eighties: "Suddenly we had a team of programmers, whose competence and imagination exceeded hardware limitations, we knew their games would sell if only we could produce them."

Eventually the R&D team conceptualised and built the Scramble hardware and the board arrived early in 1980. Konami already had a lot of software ready for the new hardware that was being stored on older models of the boards, and it wouldn't be long before these machines hit the arcades and gamers got their first taste of the Scramble hardware. The board itself would take its name from *Scramble*, a game that couldn't be completed on the old hardware due to graphical limitations.

However, Konami made a mistake here that would shape the future of the gaming industry. It deliberately left out security software from the arcade board, and more importantly at that time, the games, so that it could port its backlog of software more quickly. More on that later though…

Kozuki and Nakama meanwhile revisited Stern Electronics, a long-time partner from the days of pinball and amusements. Both parties knew that Stern had access to more arcades and outlets for amusement machines across the US than anybody else at that time. Most of the money made from games came from arcade operators and a myriad of business models for the rental, ownership and placing of machines. Stern had the network and the facility to be able to manufacture and place Konami's machines across the United States and, to a lesser degree, in Europe. For Stern, the attraction was that it wanted to enter the gaming arena, but was finding it challenging to do so; for Konami, it now had a platform for its new hardware.

While Stern would take up distribution in the US, Sega would undertake the challenge for Konami in Japan, and would have first refusal on any games that Stern didn't licence for the US market.

With a network in place, Konami delivered 26 arcade games to market in 1981 via the Scramble hardware. Licensee's tended to replicate Konami's actual games, but as Konami was still benefiting financially it took no action. The Scramble hardware was a runaway success; most arcade boards wouldn't see that many games in a lifetime. Meanwhile, Stern too licensed the hardware to further its own videogame ambitions.

Astonishingly, given the frequency of releases, it was the quality on display that amazed gamers and the industry alike. *Scramble* was the top performer of the initial run, shifting 10 million units and making $20 million in just two months. Contrary to popular belief this wasn't the first *Nemesis*, but a standalone shooter that saw the player piloting a jet fighter. Such was the clamour for *Scramble*, its sequel, *Super Cobra*, was released just four months later – this time replacing the jet with a helicopter. While the likes of *Amidar* and *Video Hustler* did well at the arcades, it was *Frogger* that became the highlight of Konami's year. Distributed by Sega, *Frogger* became the must-have arcade title of 1981, and doubled the revenue made by *Scramble* in three months. Konami could do no wrong and Parker Brothers eventually converted *Frogger* to the Atari VCS, meaning Konami games had entered a new market that it hadn't considered entering until that point.

Despite the company's success in 1981, the board was unhappy. Things were going well, but it was losing a lot of revenue via third parties. Furthermore, if you asked the average gamer who made *Scramble* they would reply with an assured confidence 'Stern', and the same gamer when confronted with the same question for *Frogger* would reply 'Sega'. For all its success, Konami, like SNK at that time, was unknown to the masses.

Therefore, the decision was made to develop a new logo and to set up overseas operations, primarily in the United States



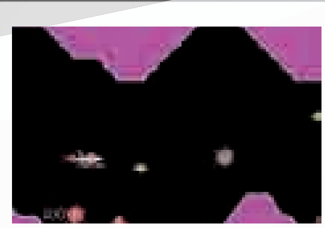
The rare Game Gear *Frogger*, can you guess where Konami and Sega went to discuss it?

SIX OF THE BEST



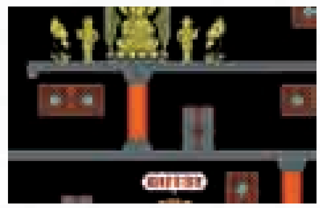
Pooyan 1982

A simple retelling of *The Three Little Pigs* story, *Pooyan* became an instant classic when it was released in arcades. The player takes control of a pig, armed with a bow and arrow, being hoisted up and down in a lift, with the general idea being to shoot the balloons that are laden with wolves. Cleverly layered strategies and awesome cut-scenes made *Pooyan* an absolute must-have.



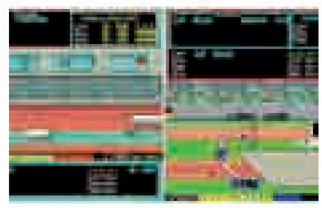
Scramble 1982

The game that defined a generation. The taunt: "How far can you invade our Scramble system?" was soon the talk of playgrounds, and in a world where scores were what mattered, it was all the player needed. Scrolling to the right, you had to infiltrate the Scramble system, bombing fuel dumps to replenish an ever-decreasing supply. Made better in the arcade for its lack of home versions.



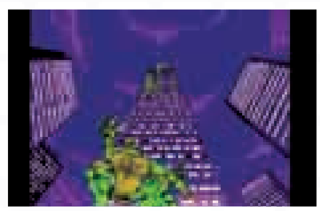
Shao-lin's Road/Kicker 1985

The game that was almost a sequel to *Yie Ar Kung Fu*. After seeing *Kung Fu Master*, Konami decided to create a fighting game derivative. Played out over four levels with occasional bosses, the player must defeat all enemies on a level before moving on to the next. *Elevator Action* meets martial arts perhaps. Excellent fun, but sadly overlooked nonetheless.



Hyper Sports 1984

The sequel to *Track & Field* became the videogame companion to the 1984 Olympics. More refined than its predecessor, it had a host of new events to delight gamers. Skill was as important as brute force this time, with many complaining they couldn't pass the vault stage. For those who did, a great game awaited. The weightlifting alone was worth the credit price.



Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles 1989

The most sought-after IP of 1989. Konami gave the kids what they wanted with this behemoth. All the characters from the show were included and the animation was better than the cartoon, as were the cut-scenes. Louder than anything the arcades had seen until that point, *Turtles* defined what would be the arcades of the early Nineties. Plays nice, even today.



Super Contra 1986

The follow-on to *Contra*, this time letting players bring a friend to the carnage. The visuals and sound were better realised, the gameplay was tough, but rewarding, and gamers could be heard whooping with delight as they took a boss down. For the first time in the series the bosses had imagination, but the home versions couldn't convey the energy of the arcade game.

and then in Europe. To fund these activities Konami received investment from the Osaka Small and Medium Business Investment & Consultation Co, Ltd. This provided much needed liquidity, as the nature of its licensing agreements meant that it was paid almost on a royalty basis for a game's success, sometimes 12 months after the money was made.

By 1982, Konami had a new corporate identity and, more importantly, a US base, allowing it, for the first time, to manufacture direct to consumers in the US, as well as Japan. Another raft of games followed, but this time to a more muted response. The arcade marketplace was becoming overcrowded, and operators were now reluctant to replace known money-making machines, ironically two of these were Konami's own games. SNK, Taito, Sega and Universal all hit their strides in 1982 making it a golden year, while Konami's restructure had once again put it behind the competition. Its sales performance was less than stellar, although the saving grace would be *Time Pilot*, a four-way scrolling shoot-'em-up, that would become a true classic. Then came the quirky platform-styled game *Roc 'N Rope*, that saw the main character swinging across chasms while avoiding enemies.

Most notably in 1982 for Konami, Parker Brothers would release *Frogger* on VCS (featuring Sega's name on the box; the start of a fallout between the two Japanese companies that would last a decade), and would continue to publish Konami games like *Amidar* on the Atari system, while *Scramble* would finally make a belated home appearance on the ColecoVision, and the Texas range of PCs.

However, 1983 would be the watershed year for Konami – the year that gamers noticed the company as a real gaming force. By now well-established in the US, 1983 saw two of the most significant arcade releases from Konami: the first, *Gyruss*, was a game styled around the exceptional *Galaga*, but improved on the game immensely finding the middle ground between the aforementioned and *Demon Attack*. But it was late in 1983 that Konami released one of the most famous arcade games of all time, and burnt its brand into gamers psyche the world over. *International Track & Field* contained six athletic events, and brought two-player arcade gaming to a plateau few games have reached since and none had arrived at before. It was the controls that ushered in a new spirit in two-player gaming, a game of athletics that required athletics to play it – two run buttons and an action button saw players frantically button bashing to power their on-screen avatars, the speed of players matched the speed of the on-screen athletes. Resplendent with occidental Easter eggs, *Track & Field* was a master of invention that left all who saw it spellbound. So impressed was Atari that it approached Konami for the licence and went on to bundle the 2600 version with a special controller that was far more durable than the standard joypad, mimicking the arcade setup and allowing players to bash as hard as they would in the arcades. With the media build-up of what would become the most watched Olympic Games of the modern era, the longevity of *International Track & Field* was assured.

Towards the end of 1983, Konami decided to enter the home computer industry properly, throwing its considerable weight behind the new series of MSX computers that were becoming ever more

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK





Ⓐ Konami didn't often get it wrong, but when it did it did so with aplomb. As *Gangbusters* proves.



Ⓐ Michael Biehn is Solid Snake! Well, he is on the box art.



Ⓐ *Parodius* is a superb micky take of Konami's *Gradius* franchise.

popular in Japan. Starting with *Time Pilot*, *Frogger* and *Super Cobra*, the take-up rate was incredible, and it was on the MSX that Konami made its first licensed game in 1984, a quirky platform game based on the must-have toy of the year, the Cabbage Patch Kids. It was also around this time that a young talent called Hideo Kojima joined Konami. Disappointed at not being able to make the arcade games that he loved (Kojima had hoped to be involved in 1984's *Badlands*, Konami's first foray into Laserdisc games), he soon learnt and mastered his craft in the Konami home division, helping out with many of the MSX titles before being given reign to create.

Konami's arcade presence was starting to wane in 1985, with new games like *Shao-lin's Road*, *Yie Ar Kung Fu* and *Green Beret* struggling to find their voice in a crowded market, despite their obvious quality (with *Green Beret* being especially challenging). Unusually for Konami, it tailored the marketing to each region and renamed the game *Rush'N Attack* for the US market to cash in on the pre-glasnost delirium of Eighties Middle America.

With the successful home versions for the MSX and licensing deals across the world with companies like Ocean for home conversions, numbers were considerably up, and Konami, who had recently negotiated with Gulf and Western to purchase the American assets of Sega, was fast becoming a leviathan.

As focus turned to the home and Nintendo's Famicom, Konami was seriously considering leaving the arcades behind, as it had little appetite for the cabinets that were becoming the point of difference in arcades. It became Nintendo's first third-party developer and achieved a level of freedom with the Famicom that would be granted to nobody else.

This mind-set changed abruptly, however, on the release of *Nemesis*, which doubled the first-year sales of *Scramble* in just a six-week period. The brooding landscapes and power-up meters added something special to the shooting genre that entranced gamers all over the world. It wasn't just the game, the soundtrack was released the following year on CD and subsequently went platinum; Kozuki finally had the game he wanted, and *Nemesis* found itself not only converted to almost all known formats across the world, but also the genesis of Konami's first popular franchise.

The following year *Gryzor* arrived in the arcade, once again drawing huge crowds and as Nintendo readied the NES for its North American launch Konami was unassailable. A different games roster defined the company worldwide, in the arcades it was *Gradius* and *Contra*, the MSX and Famicom were home to *Castlevania* and *Sorcery*, while European gamers largely had the arcades and third-party conversions of Konami games at home.

Konami was already tailoring games to individual markets when it hit upon a cost-cutting exercise that would again change gaming, certainly for the decade that followed. In Japan, Konami could produce its own Famicom cartridges, in America, however, it had to use Nintendo's factory to manufacture NES cartridges, so the decision was taken to cut as much from Japanese games as possible, including frames of animation, intro movies and cut-scenes, to reduce the cartridge costs. Most gamers didn't notice, having not been exposed to both versions of a game. Worse still was Konami's policy of stripping as much as it could get away with out of its arcade games when it converted them to Famicom and NES, again to cut costs. The opposite end of the scale saw licensed conversions from third parties mainly aimed at the European 8-bit market shine, while in

KONAMI TIMELINE 1969-1989

1969 KAGEMASA KOZUKI (CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER) FOUNDED A JUKEBOX RENTAL AND REPAIR BUSINESS AT 148 KOZUSHIMA, TOYONAKA, OSAKA.

1973 KONAMI INDUSTRY CO, LTD IS ESTABLISHED AT 3-124-1 MEISHINGUCHI, TOYONAKA, OSAKA WITH CAPITAL OF 1 MILLION YEN. KONAMI BEGINS TO MANUFACTURE AMUSEMENT MACHINES FOR ARCADES.

1978 KONAMI CREATES AND BEGINS TO MARKET VIDEOGAMES.

1979 KONAMI EXPORTS PRODUCTS TO THE US FOR THE FIRST TIME (THIS MARKED THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS EXPANSION INTO THE US).

1980 KONAMI SIGNS PUBLISHING DEAL WITH SEGA AND STERN.

1981 THE KONAMI LOGO IS ESTABLISHED.

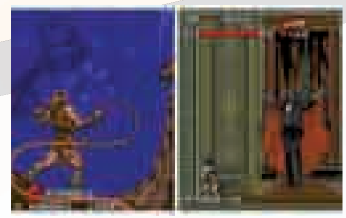
1982 SCRAMBLE IS THE COMPANY'S FIRST RUNAWAY SUCCESS. KONAMI LICENCES THE SCRAMBLE BOARD TO OTHER COMPANIES SUCH AS STERN AND ARTIC. KONAMI ESTABLISHES A BASE IN THE UNITED STATES.

SIX TO MISS



Combat School 1988

By now there were four versions of *Track & Field* and the movie of the year was Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge*, so Konami moved fast to get this out. *Track & Field*, under the guise of military training. The events were too hard, the graphics and sound were below Konami's usual standard, and all that you learnt was how to make a bomb.



Haunted Castle 1988

Castlevania is amazing, but Konami has got it wrong with the series occasionally. Here it cut the levels, softened the bosses and removed all but the most basic power-up. An attempt to share the success of *Rastan* that backfired, *Haunted Castle* is far removed from a hack-'n'-slash romp, and the sales proved that the Belmont's are best left at home.



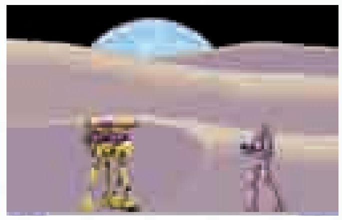
Tutankham 1982

This looked amazing and was really an early *Gauntlet*. The problem was that as you explored, you were so relentlessly attacked that you couldn't see where you were going. Enemies, such as bats and snakes, came at you from all sides, and as you fended them off the clock was ticking, time runs out, game over. Relentless and awful.



WEC Le Mans 1986

Le Mans was the game Konami hoped would close the gap on Sega's great racers. Sadly, the graphics were so fast many gamers felt nauseous, while the game itself was housed in a cab that spun when the car did. Many operators removed the machines for health and safety reasons. Would have been more successful if marketed as a theme park ride.



Galactic Warriors 1984

The original *Rise Of The Robots*. Despite the impressive visuals, *Galactic Warriors* has one of the clumsiest interfaces of any arcade game. Two meagrely paced robots do stop-motion battle in outer space, controlled by a stick and three buttons; it seldom feels like the gamer has any control over the proceedings.



Jailbreak 1986

Konami created retro gaming in 1986, by releasing a game that looked 20 years old at inception. There's been a jailbreak and it's your job to shoot some villains, while avoiding civilians, repeating for as long as you have heart for it. It's the only arcade game where gamers don't want to see the title screen. What it does it does well, but it does so little.

"AS THE EIGHTIES DREW TO A CLOSE KONAMI LEFT ITS MOST INDELIBLE MARK ON GAMING – TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES"

Japan, the MSX and MSX2 housed what would become two of Konami's finest games, Kojima's *Metal Gear* and *Snatcher*.

Nintendo was suitably unimpressed by a lacklustre line-up of games from third parties. It didn't want thick and fast, it wanted quality. In an unprecedented reaction, Nintendo limited all licensees to release only five games per year.

Konami baulked at this decision and a meeting was called between Yamauchi Hiroshi, the then-Nintendo CEO, and Yoshinobu Nakama, Hiro Matsuda and Shokichi Ishihara of Konami. Neither was in a mood for compromise, and the middle ground that they found wasn't all that they had hoped for. Konami couldn't be granted an exception because of the other licensees, but an agreement was made that Konami could create a subsidiary that would share the same preferable terms that favoured the company when it came to Famicom development on the NES. Ultra Games would largely port MSX conversions to the NES and handle the distribution of EA games like *Skate Or Die* over the coming years.

As the Eighties drew to a close Konami would leave its most indelible mark on the gaming landscape. Disenchanted with its own movie licence some years before, Konami sought new movie tie-ins, games that would in Ankara's own words: "Make people feel like they were in a movie."

The developer set up an internal team to source suitable properties to create games from. Fortunately, the team managed to hit gold first time. *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* was the first time the modern world had seen a brand experience such exposure, and Konami had the rights to the game, and what a game it made.

A four-player game with, at the time, an oversized monitor and speakers. Konami wisely chose a simple side-scrolling walk-and-punch format, populating the game with everything that the cartoon had to offer, making it one of strongest licensed properties developed in gaming history. Konami also launched a downgrade kit that let operators turn old machines into two-player *Turtles* games. The arcade game saw revenues not seen since the days of *Pong* and *Space Invaders*. While Konami toiled to bring the game home to the masses, Nintendo supplied the company with one of the few dev kits for the forthcoming Game Boy and Super Famicom. Things were about to get even better for the one-time jukebox heroes.



Crime Fighters: an excellent scrolling fighter that's brutal but humourous.

1983 KONAMI ENTERS THE HOME COMPUTER BUSINESS, DEVELOPING AND PRODUCING SOFTWARE FOR THE MSX RANGE OF COMPUTERS IN JAPAN.

1984 KONAMI SETS UP ITS UK OPERATIONS. THE GREAT VIDEO CRASH TAKES DOWN MANY OF KONAMI'S LICENSEES, BUT LEAVES THE COMPANY UNSCATHED.

1985 KONAMI DEVELOPS THE FIRST ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTER TO HAVE SPECIAL MOVES; YIE AR KUNG FU. THIS IS THE YEAR THAT KONAMI GAINS LICENCES TO PUBLISH FOR THE NINTENDO FAMICOM.

1986 KONAMI STARTS TO RELEASE GAMES FOR NES. CONTRA MAKES ITS ARCADE DEBUT.

1987 KONAMI LOOKS TO BRING HOME TITLES TO THE ARCADES. DESPITE BEING POLISHED WITH SUPERIOR AUDIO AND VISUALS, HAUNTED CASTLE (THE CASTLEVANIA REMAKE) BOMBS. THE IDEAL FADES WITH IT. METAL GEAR DEBUTS IN JAPAN.

1988 KONAMI IS LISTED ON THE TOKYO STOCK EXCHANGE.

1989 KONAMI RELEASES TURTLES IN TIME, ITS BIGGEST SELLING ARCADE TITLE TO DATE.

KONAMI GALLERY



M.I.A.: Missing In Action Year Released: 1989



Quarth Year Released: 1989



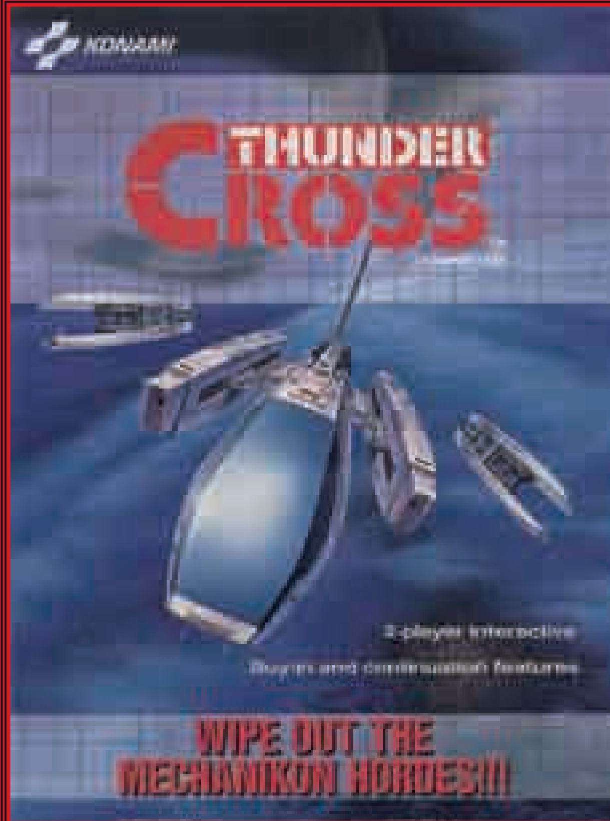
Nemesis Year Released: 1985



X-Men Year Released: 1992



Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters Year Released: 1994



Thunder Cross Year Released: 1988



Crypt Killer Year Released: 1995



Jail Break Year Released: 1986

The Definitive BOULDER DASH

HERE AT **RETRO GAMER**, WE REALLY DIG OUR DEDICATED TRUTH-SEEKER **STUART CAMPBELL**. HE'S AN EARTHY FELLOW WHO CALLS A SPADE A SPADE, BUT THERE'S NOBODY BETTER AT DISHING THE DIRT ON THE SECRET HISTORY BEHIND CLASSIC GAME SERIES. SO STAND BY FOR A FIRM GROUNDING IN THE STORY OF ONE OF THE MOST LEGENDARY NAMES IN RETRO GAMING, AS HE RAISES A GLASS TO THE MIGHTY BOULDER DASH. HERE'S MUD IN YOUR EYE! *(PLEASE STOP – ED)*

B*oulder Dash* isn't only one of the most-ported videogames of all time (there have been official releases on almost 20 different formats, and that's not including the numerous mobile-phone titles, which we don't have room to go into here), it's also one of the most copied. A brief Google identifies almost 300 known clones, from faithful unofficial Windows ports of the original EGA PC version to obscure and curious remakes which use the *BD* rules and physics merely as jumping-off points to take the gameplay in all sorts of weird and extreme directions. So it's fitting that *Boulder Dash* itself is not only a bit of a clone, but a clone of one of the *least*-known games of all time. In an interview with a *Boulder Dash* fansite (www.boulder-dash.nl), author Peter Liepa described how he contacted a local game publisher looking for work, and:

"The publisher put me in touch with Chris Gray, who had submitted a game in BASIC, but didn't at the time have the skills to convert it into machine language. So this seemed like a good project to get my feet wet, and I sat down and got started. The game was similar to an arcade game called *The Pit*, but after examining it more I didn't think the game had any 'legs' – too much of it was predetermined. But I started playing with basic elements of dirt, rocks, and jewels and within a couple of days had built the basic 'physics engine' of what was to become *Boulder Dash*."

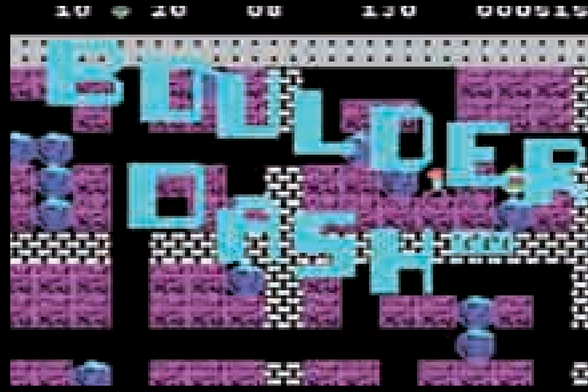
Alert readers will, of course, already recall **RG** issue 51's 'Families Reunited' feature, where we explored the influence of the long-forgotten *The Pit* in the development of *Boulder Dash* (and *Gran Turismo*), but it wasn't the basic scenario elements or the physics that would make *BD* one of the most loved and persistent franchises in the history of gaming. Rather, it was what Liepa did with that basic DNA that saw *Boulder Dash* achieve the sort of success and fame that *The Pit* could only dream of, and live on for the next 24 years and beyond. Join us over the next nine pages as we embark on an odyssey which, by the time you read it, will have whetted your appetite irresistibly for *Boulder Dash – Pirate's Quest*, due in all good retailers around the end of 2008! *(They're not paying us for this, just get on with it – Ed)*

1984

BOULDER DASH (ATARI 800, SPECTRUM, C64, MSX, APPLE II, MS-DOS, COLECOVISION, AND MANY MORE)

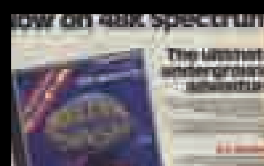
The Pit was a great little game, but it was very one-dimensional, a pure action game designed to separate arcade-goers from their money quickly by repeating the same two single-screen levels of obvious objectives and dangers over and over at ever-crazier speeds. *Boulder Dash* applied the core concept and physics to a set of 16 expansive scrolling stages (plus four bonus 'intermissions' where you could win an extra life), which largely threw away the action element altogether and replaced it with cerebral puzzling, where you had to manipulate a small set of objects to produce a solution in ways which you were left to work out for yourself.

Indeed, you could construct a pretty convincing argument that says *Boulder Dash* was the first 'sandbox' game, in that it was sometimes as much fun just to muck around and see what happened as it was to try to beat the levels. But even if you just went straight for the goal, you'd be there a long time – the normal 16 levels were tough enough, but the game also came with five difficulty settings, which completely changed the layout of objects within the caves, effectively making the game five times the size. Indeed, there's so much in *Boulder Dash* that it's a wonder anyone was ready for a sequel as soon as the next year.



» The most unique thing about the Japanese versions of *BD* is that when you get an extra life, instead of the classic 'twinkling passages' effect, the logo flashes on to the screen for a fraction of a second instead. Blink and you'll miss it, so we've preserved it here for posterity.

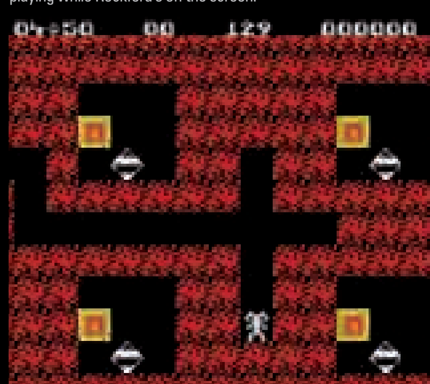
A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE



The Spectrum version of *Boulder Dash* was a decent port, albeit inferior to most of the others due to a significantly reduced screen area (16 blocks by 11, rather than the 20x12 of most other versions). But it wins one category hands down: most barefaced advertising lie of its generation. For some reason (quite possibly related to the screen-size difference), the poor old Speccy's scrolling couldn't keep up with Rockford's movement – if you kept running, he'd run right off the display altogether, disappearing into danger that you couldn't see until he stopped or encountered an obstacle that let the scrolling catch up. First Star spotted this problem before the game's release, but what to do? Fixing it might have been time-consuming and expensive, leaving it with a tricky decision to make. So instead, First Star decided, with considerable chutzpah, to turn it into a selling point.

"Superb scroll routine, described by experts as one of the best pieces of Spectrum programming ever!" trumpeted the very first line of the full-page ads in the games press, relegating the game's many other wonderful features and glowing reviews to mere supporting roles to a bug. The identity of these 'experts' was never revealed, nor their field of expertise, but it seems most likely that the field was sarcasm.

» In fact, on the Spectrum you pretty much *have* to do this stage by playing while Rockford's off the screen.



The Definitive BOULDER DASH

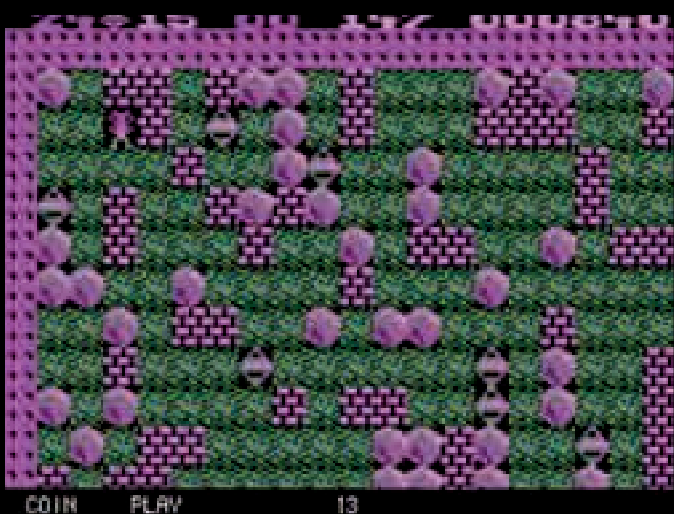
1984
BOULDER DASH (ARCADE)

Moving to arcades with incredible swiftness, the history of coin-op *Boulder Dash* is strange and confused. (*BD* ties with *Lode Runner* as the first game to appear in arcades after originating on a home computer. The Vectrex title *Cosmic Chasm* made the trip a year earlier, but that's a console game.) The first arcade *Boulder Dash* was released in 1984 by Exidy, via its 'Max-A-Flex' system, which was essentially an Atari 600XL in a cabinet, running games off cartridges which would also work in a bog-standard home-version Atari 800. The game, then, was almost identical to the original (even including the level select), but with one big difference – your coins only bought you time, in extremely stingy 30-second units. If you didn't feed it more *before* your time was up, your game was over regardless of whether you'd lost your lives or not (indeed, in 30 seconds it's barely possible to lose all your lives even if you try) – you don't even get a few seconds of grace to find some more money once the clock runs down.

Horrible time-limit coin-ops based on home hardware were a weird anomaly of the Eighties and Nineties – there were better-known versions based around the NES, Mega Drive and SNES as well as the Max-A-Flex, but the thoughtful, puzzly nature of *Boulder Dash* lent itself even less well to the concept than most games did.



» See? Much prettier, despite being squeezed into a pillar-box shape.



» A rare example of an arcade game of the Eighties looking worse than most of its home-format counterparts, there.

1985
BOULDER DASH (ARCADE)

Fortunately, then, it was only a year before an entirely different coin-op version of *Boulder Dash* showed up. Data East's 'DECO Cassette System' hardware was one of the oddest things ever to appear in arcades – a tape-based format that took several minutes to load the games in every time the machine was switched off – but it offered developers a cheap way into the expensive market, and coder Comptiq (creator of the better of the two MSX versions) took advantage by putting together a nice enhanced-graphics version of the game. The abstract graphics for enemies like the Butterflies were replaced with proper insecty-looking ones, the boulders were smoother and more boulder-looking, and the colour palette was a lot livelier.

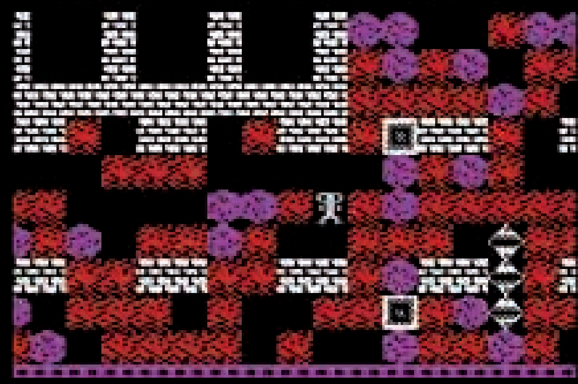
The most unusual thing about the DECO *Boulder Dash* is that it runs on a vertical monitor, rather than the horizontal aspect of the original home versions and the Exidy coin-op. The resulting space restrictions saw the display grid reduced to 15x12 – smaller even than the Speccy port – and some subtle and sneaky changes to level layouts at the same time (see the lower-right-hand compartments of Cave B for an example) meant that even experienced *Boulder Dash* players had to be careful as they made their way around the stages.

1985

BOULDER DASH II – ROCKFORD'S RIOT AKA ROCKFORD'S REVENGE AKA CHAMPION BOULDER DASH AKA SUPER BOULDER DASH (MULTIPLE FORMATS)

When making sequels to finely balanced, essentially simple games like *Boulder Dash*, it's important not to go overboard with new features, and *Rockford's Riot* didn't fall into that trap. (*Riot*, incidentally, was the name of the MSX version, while the C64 and PC had the '*Revenge*' suffix instead. The Spectrum version was reviewed and advertised with the '*Riot*' title, but the cassette inlay called it '*Revenge*'. The versions released for Japan-only computers like the PC-8801 and FM-7 went by the '*Champion*' name. Why do these people hate me so much?) There were only two new additions to the original formula – 'slime' walls that could hold diamonds and boulders up for a random amount of time, but which they'll eventually drop through, and expanding walls, which grew into any spaces you dig directly next to them, rendering them impassable once you moved away.

In 1986, Electronic Arts bought up the rights to the first two *Boulder Dash* games and sold them together in a two-for-the-price-of-one release called *Super Boulder Dash* on Commodore, Atari, Apple and PC formats. (In the strictest sense, *Super Boulder Dash* was the name of EA's release of the sequel, and *Boulder Dash 1* was simply a bonus freebie.) Which was nice of EA, even if it did apparently hate Speccy owners.



» The sequel doesn't waste any time getting to the tough levels. Smashing your way into those closed-off caverns at the top left is a hellish job.

» See how long it takes you to pick out Rockford in this C64 shot.



1986

BOULDER DASH 3 AKA PROFESSIONAL BOULDER DASH 3 (APPLE II, C64, SPECTRUM, PC)

Ironically, the next game in the series was a gigantically *un*professional mess-up. An ill-advised change to an 'outer-space' theme hacked fans off straight away, and an ugly, mostly monochrome colour scheme made things even worse. Piling on the misery, from the word 'go' the levels were joyless, pernickety chores, often based around split-second move-timing, which was a hideous nightmare to implement with the series' trademark sluggish and unreliable control response. Countless levels put you in positions where you'd have to spend several minutes setting up a situation, then execute a flawless close-quarters move to start it off, which was basically a coin-toss. Either the controls would let you get away with it, or you'd arbitrarily get exploded by a monster the instant you pressed the button and have to start the whole level all over again.

Compound these various disasters with bugs that made some of the levels uncompleteable and you end up with a total catastrophe. Interestingly, the only halfway-playable version of the game was a bootleg made for Commodore's *epic fail* machine the Plus/4, which hacked the levels into that machine's port of ordinary *Boulder Dash* and thereby at least solved the problem of the monochrome graphics making it hard to see what was happening.

The Definitive BOULDER DASH

1986
BOULDER DASH CONSTRUCTION KIT AKA BOULDER DASH IV (C64, APPLE II, ATARI 800, ATARI ST, SPECTRUM)

After the embarrassment that was *Boulder Dash 3*, First Star realised that it couldn't just go on punting out new level sets as full-price games, and finally made the *Construction Kit* available to the general public, along with another one-sixth of a sequel (12 pre-built stages and three intermissions rather than the usual 16+4, but also lacking the five difficulty settings of the previous games). The emphasis was placed differently according to which release you bought – the original cover art advertised *Boulder Dash Construction Kit* with no mention of there being any ready-made stages at all, whereas the Speccy budget re-release was titled *Boulder Dash IV – The Game*, with the inclusion of the level editor reduced to a little footnote at the bottom.

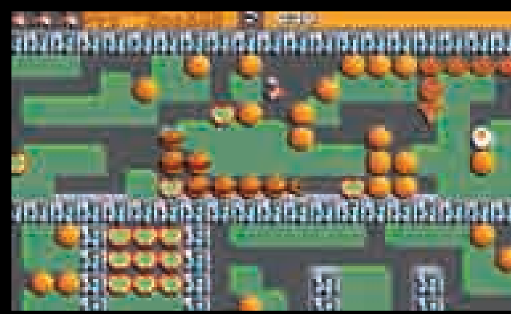
The latter approach is slightly odd, as this sequel was a release designed to actively encourage use of the level editor – because the built-in caves were among the most hateful, cheating *Boulder Dash* stages ever created. The first one in particular is so tedious and completely unfair that the game lets you choose any starting level (rather than the traditional format of letting you start on 1, 5, 9 or 12), presumably on the grounds that otherwise nobody would ever have seen the second, third and fourth caves, but the rest are barely any better, with much reliance on expanding walls to force the player into a miserable life of trial and error. In fact, the level design – fairly incredibly – manages to make *Boulder Dash 3* look like a loving, painstaking work of genius.

The construction kit itself, however, was comprehensive and easy to use, and would be the foundation for countless 'unofficial sequels' for years to come.



» *Construction Kit* was the only one of the four original games to appear on a 16-bit format. This is the Atari ST version.

» The colours were somewhat garish, but *Rockford* is a lot of fun if you don't mind wearing shades while you play.



1988
ROCKFORD (AMIGA, ATARI ST, 8-BITS, ARCADE)

The short-lived Arcadia coin-op system of the late Eighties saw a clutch of UK computer games make the unusual trip from home formats to arcades, including *Road Wars*, *Xenon* and this. *Rockford* was the first *Boulder Dash* game to leave behind the generic caverns and put Rockford into a variety of settings, playing the role of a cowboy, spaceman, doctor, chef and explorer.

While in itself it's a pretty straightforward and rather fabby *BD* game – slick and fast moving, with an all-new engine for the first time in four years and five games – there are several weird things about *Rockford*. The Amiga version had an option for mouse control (which was fashionable at the time for action games, thankfully very briefly), and the Spectrum version came with a free game on the 'B-side' of the tape, in the form of *Rockman*. Despite the name it was a completely unrelated *Space Panic*-style platform game, which had previously been sold on its own as a £1.99 Mastertronic title. (The Atari 800 port came with an even more tenuous 'B-side' game called *Crystal Raider*, another unrelated Mastertronic platformer not dissimilar to the PC and Xbox Live Arcade game *N+*, and the C64's freebie abandoned even the slightest thematic connection to *Boulder Dash* with an arcade adventure called *Back To Reality*.)

None of this made *Rockford* the success it deserved to be, and it's still dismissed by hardcore *BD* fans as not being a 'true' *Boulder Dash*. But then, since when have hardcore fans of *anything* not been idiots?

1990
BOULDER DASH PART 2 AKA BOULDER DASH (ARCADE)

The name of this one's still a bit of a mystery. Absolutely everywhere you look on the internet you'll find it referred to by the unwieldy name '*Boulder Dash/Boulder Dash Part 2*', but there's no apparent evidence to call it anything other than *Boulder Dash*. That's certainly the name that appears on the title screen of both the Japanese and Western versions, and there's nothing on the credits screen or anywhere else to suggest otherwise. You would have to assume that the name came from *somewhere*, but this reporter has no idea where – there's no sign of the original game as an option, for example.

Anyway, this is a rather spiffy game (all-new, though versions of a few favourite levels make guest appearances) that's more in the vein of *Rockford* than the earlier titles, but zipped up even more for an arcade audience. Tricky situations can now be recovered through 'Escape mode', where holding down both fire buttons lets you smash through boulders, some sorts of walls, and out of sticky spider webs, at a cost of a loss of 20 seconds of the time limit. Also aiding your swift progress through the levels is the fact that although a stage is reset if you die, any diamonds collected are kept and count towards your total on the next try, and if you run out of time you have the option of sacrificing one of your lives to continue from the current point without starting the level again.

Part 2 – if that is indeed its name – is a highly entertaining game. It edges back towards the action bias of *The Pit* with its relentless pace and plentiful enemies, but it's still unmistakeably *Boulder Dash*.



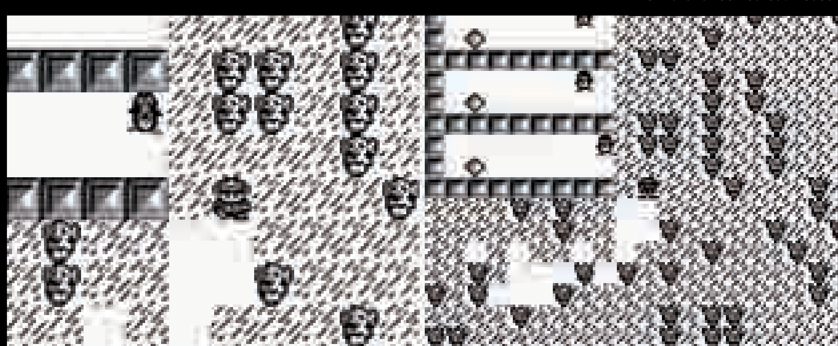
» This world is fairly sedate visually. The one with leopard-skin earth will make your eyes ill.

1990
BOULDER DASH (GAME BOY)

They really knocked themselves out coming up with the titles, didn't they? To be fair, these next two 1990 releases (the GB version coded by 8-bit favourites Beam Software of *Horace/Exploding Fist/The Hobbit* fame) are basically ports of the original game at heart. The Game Boy one in particular is just the same 16 stages and four intermissions (including the selectable difficulty levels and entry points, though at the default setting the difficulty has been lowered by reducing the number of diamonds you need to exit each stage). You do, however, get music and cutesy graphics (a different visual theme for each of the four worlds) and a nice pause feature where you can stop and scroll around the map, either in the normal game view or in a zoomed-out view where you can see much more of the level. (Zoomed-out mode, which you can also play the game in, has a whopping 20x16 grid, bigger than any of the 8-bit versions, whereas the default mode is a quarter the size at 10x8.)

Unlike the computer versions, the scrolling is also fixed around your character's movement, so you never find yourself getting too close to unseen dangers at the edges of the screen. Add in far more responsive controls and a continue option that lets you carry on from the stage you last reached, and what you get is probably the definitive, most enjoyable version of the original *Boulder Dash*.

» This is Cave E seen in both normal and zoomed-out modes.



The Definitive Boulder Dash

1990
BOULDER DASH (NES)

This one gets its own entry because, while it's basically also a version of the original *BD*, there are quite a few fairly substantial differences in content and structure. The most obvious is that the NES game has two extra worlds on top of the four normal ones, although you lose the intermission mini-levels. Progression is totally different to previous versions, too – initially you can only start in the first world, though you can tackle each of the four stages within any world in any order you like. (As you play, you collect passwords that enable you to skip straight to later worlds – there's a so-called 'continue' option, but it sends you right back to the start of the current world.)

The five selectable difficulty levels for each cave have also disappeared, and in fact the only difficult level is considerably easier than even the lowest setting on the original game, because, as with the GB version, the diamond requirements have been significantly lowered. On Cave D, for example, you can now head for the exit after collecting just 18 of a possible 36 diamonds, whereas the original demands all 36. Slightly compensating for that are tweaked level layouts (the layouts and diamond requirements are actually both taken straight from the DECO Cassette System arcade version, not all that surprisingly since the NES port was also made by Data East), but overall it's certainly an easier game despite lacking the responsiveness of the Game Boy's controls and the zoomed-out map option.

A curious omission, incidentally, is that neither of the Nintendo versions have a 'suicide' option, so be careful not to get yourself trapped somewhere you can't get killed or you'll have to hang around twiddling your thumbs until the time runs out.



» For those of you keeping track of such details, the NES game has a 14x16 grid.

» It would have been nice to have the option to play with slightly less twee graphics, but you can't have everything.



2002
BOULDER DASH EX (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

Having pretty much run out of formats to convert the original game to by now, and with the third and fourth titles too unpopular to be worth widely porting, the Nineties were a very quiet time for *Boulder Dash*, which was almost entirely bypassed by the 16-bit generation. It wasn't until the GBA appeared that the classic earth-digging format was revived, and it was revived in dramatic style with a radical overhaul that brought it – appropriately enough – right into the 21st Century.

Boulder Dash EX respectfully includes the original Atari 800 game (the *proper* original, with original graphics, layouts and diamond requirements, but with a GB-style map-scroll pause function to compensate for the smaller 12x10 grid and improved control response), but of far more interest is Kemco's updated version. For the first time, *Boulder Dash* featured power-ups, like pickaxes, which could smash a single boulder, bombs, and mysterious gravity-altering items which rotated the screen through 90 degrees, completely altering a level's layout and nature in an instant. Other major alterations included a life bar instead of instant death (a single rock to the head was still fatal, but enemies and falling diamonds only cause damage), the loss of being able to dig out/push the square next to you without moving (replaced by the ability to kick boulders long distances, *Bomberman*-style), and tragically, the disappearance of Rockford himself, replaced by an irritating generic pixie/elf/monkey thing.

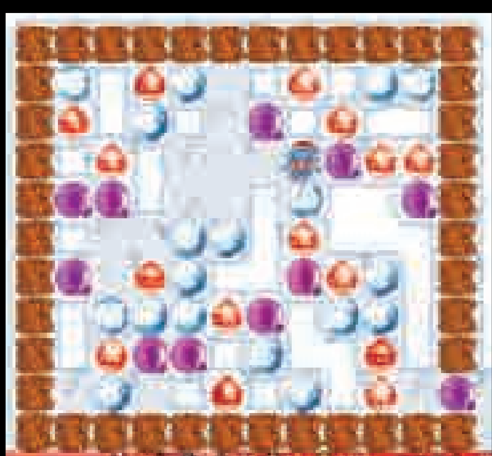
From very early on, the stages get clever and cunning, and you'll have to get on top of the new physics and new abilities quickly. Everything is introduced carefully and gradually, but without intelligence-insulting tutorials talking you through it, and before you know it you're ensnared in a world of fiendish, brilliant puzzles. (Well, *five* worlds to be precise, each with ten puzzles. In a nice nod to the original game you can simply clear each stage with a minimum requirement, or you can beat them 'properly' by getting everything, for which you're rewarded with a special star on the map screen and a bonus collecting card.) If anything, it's perhaps just a tiny bit too easy, but otherwise this is one of the finest re-imaginings of an 8-bit classic ever.

2002
BOULDER DASH XMAS 2002 EDITION (PC)

2002's other *Boulder Dash* revival has already had praise lavished on it in the splendid 'Families Reunited' feature in **RG** 51. But it's well worth mentioning it again, because this is just a completely fantastic game, and by a mile the best in the series so far. Level design every bit as good as the GBA game but without the easiness issues, *Xmas 2002 Edition* will have you tearing your hair out, but is so good and so fair and so clever that you'll decide you looked better bald anyway. Perhaps benefiting from having years to come up with new stages, there's hardly a level here that isn't great, with even the gentle introductory levels offering enough of a challenge to cost you a few lives without cheating you (well, except maybe on 'Cramp', which is a little bit mean).

There's actually very little else to say about *Boulder Dash Xmas 2002 Edition*. It's much more of a straightforward 'classic' *Boulder Dash* than the frippery-laden *EX*, and the most innovative feature is the map structure, which both ensures that you're never stuck on a single level with nowhere else to go, and also gives you the chance to entirely bypass stages that you just can't do. It's typical of a game in which every last facet of the design appears to exist to increase the enjoyment of playing it, and you really ought to go and do just that.

» I liked *BDX2002E* so much that I finished it then deleted my save so I could start again, since I'd forgotten all the solutions.



» This early level, like numerous others in the game, gives away its trial-and-error nature by including a very easy-to-collect extra life in the bottom-left corner, because it knows you'll get killed over and over again by the fast-moving mummies until you luck into a successful attempt. There's just far too much stuff flying around to be able to plan a route.



2003
GEMJAM GOLD (PC)

A bit of an oddity here, as according to the credits screen *GemJam* "is based on" *Boulder Dash* and is licensed by First Star, but it doesn't carry the *BD* name and Rockford has again been replaced by the little blue dragon first seen in *Xmas 2002 Edition*, severing the last obvious visible link. So, an illegitimate half-brother to the rest of the series, maybe, but in every identifiable sense it belongs just as much as the others, so we'll include it here anyway. It's built very much to the same template as *Boulder Dash Xmas 2002 Edition* and has slightly more levels and variation (60 stages in four different graphical styles, rather than 50 all in the same style), but it gives the impression of having been rushed out to capitalise on the success of the earlier game, and the levels simply aren't nearly as well-designed.

There's far too much running around in a random panic amid hordes of enemies all bouncing off each other, huge piles of unpredictable boulders that you have to bludgeon through by trial and error rather than carefully working out your strategy in advance, sneaky exit positioning, and suchlike, for this to be half as enjoyable as its predecessor. Where *Xmas 2002* was a mostly cerebral challenge with occasional bursts of action-based bits to break it up a little, the balance in *GemJam* is tilted more towards knockabout slapstick farce and explosions – still fun if you enjoy that sort of thing, but much less compelling because too often you feel your fate wasn't really in your own hands. And the music's pretty annoying, too.

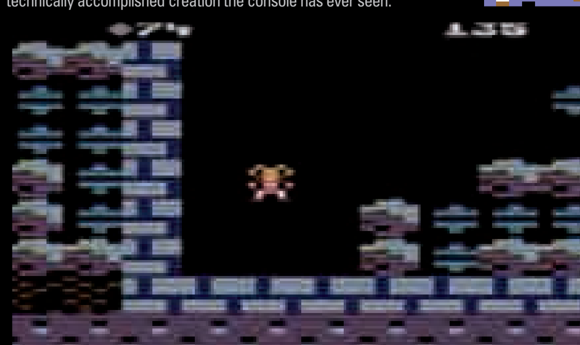
The Definitive BOULDER DASH

2003
BOULDER DASH – TREASURE PLEASURE (PC)

After the disappointment that was *GemJam*, at least FlyOrDie didn't just give up. It had another go right away, and the next 'proper' *Boulder Dash* game (released the same year) was a much stronger effort. Reverting to much more classic strategy-puzzle-oriented level design reintroduced skill and thought to the game and made it much more fun and addictive. (Check out 'Pearls' and compare it to the superficially very similar level 'Landslide' in *GemJam* to see how much more enjoyable you can make a stage with just a single rule change.) Navigating the game's pirate treasure map is also a pleasure, enabling the skipping past of lots of rather over-easy stages before the real brainteasers nearer the end. *Boulder Dash – Treasure Pleasure* is quite a bit less challenging than its two predecessors, and while they all have the same map structure, *TP* has a lot more levels that appear to be aimed at younger players, which grown-up *BD* fans won't want to bother with. (Or maybe I've just been playing so many *Boulder Dash* games this month that I'm getting too good.)

Unfortunately, it also employs a controls-reversing pick-up as an active gameplay feature, for which we have to dock it nine trillion points and with a heavy heart have everyone involved in its development and publishing brutally killed with broken-glass-covered hammers. Ooh, so close.

» If it gets finished, VCS *Boulder Dash* looks like it could well be the most technically accomplished creation the console has ever seen.





» A seafaring theme connects the various types of world in *Treasure Pleasure*.

ROCKS OF AGES

One of the odder current phenomena relating to *Boulder Dash* is the sudden upsurge in versions for ancient Atari console systems. 2006 saw both *Boulder Dash* and *Boulder Dash II* get officially licenced releases on cartridge for the extremely obscure and unsuccessful Atari 5200, coded by Mean Hamster Software. Weirder still, there's a splendid-looking port being made for the 5200's better-known predecessor the VCS. Coded by Andrew Davie, it isn't finished yet, but you can find scores of videos of it in action on YouTube (search for '2600 boulder'). It's currently slated to come out at the end of this year, hopefully again with official approval from First Star, so keep your eyes peeled for that one.

2007
BOULDER DASH: ROCKS! (PSP, DS)

We're arriving at the final entry slightly sooner than planned, because First Star spent much of the time after *Treasure Pleasure* advertising the next game in the PC series, to be called *Boulder Dash: The Guardian Quest* and slated for release in 2006. The game was developed to an advanced state, with several worlds of several levels each and a two-player 'party mode', and looked lots of fun, but was suddenly and bafflingly canned in order for First Star to concentrate on this DS and PSP release instead. (And it has stayed canned despite the company making a new PC sequel for later this year.) With the benefit of hindsight, that looks like quite a bad move.

It's not that *Rocks!* is completely terrible. It's pretty, it's got lots of inventive additions to the basic formula (including some rather good boss levels), and some interesting new gameplay modes (though most of them are annoyingly locked at the start). It's just that the main game has been designed by someone with no instinctive grasp of how either *Boulder Dash* or pure puzzle games (which is what *Rocks!* wants to be at heart) work.

The screen is zoomed in more than any other *Boulder Dash* game (just 11x8 blocks on the DS, despite a second screen going basically unused), which allows for some cute, characterful graphics, but – crucially in a game of this nature – *doesn't let you see where the hell you're going*. (Bizarrely, the PSP version, which appears to have a bigger grid, isn't due out for months yet, although UK mags reviewed it as far back as January.)

Far too many times you'll have to (for example) charge down a vertical tunnel with three exits, with a boulder falling down on top of you, but you can't see far enough ahead to tell which way you need to turn, or what might be waiting for you. Make the wrong move and you'll be trapped in a dead end or smushed by a monster, with no option but to restart the level, through no fault of your own. It gets even worse later on, when the game has the dreadful idea of introducing teleports.

You can find yourself in a screen with two different teleports, neither of whose exits are visible, where you simply have to pick one and hope it was the right choice. If you're lucky, the consequence of the wrong choice will be simply wasting time, but that's a disaster in its own right because the game's other worst feature is that levels have arbitrary and incredibly tight time limits, whereby almost any departure from the level's one pre-defined solution will result in you running out of time.

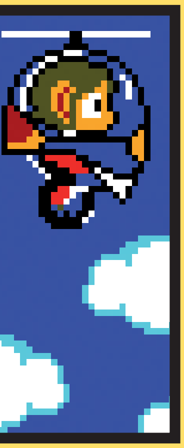
In essence, *Rocks!* is the *Rick Dangerous* of *Boulder Dash* games – a gruelling slog of trial and error, having to randomly guess your way through every claustrophobic, maze-like level (there are none of *BD*'s trademark wide-open caves here), repeatedly get killed, and then remember where you guessed wrong until you eventually get to the end without ever having employed any skill or independent strategy, which is rather unrewarding and not really what *Boulder Dash* has always been about. And all that's assuming that you haven't smashed your handheld to pieces inside an hour as a result of the game's *incredibly* infuriating insistence on stopping every five seconds to explain each of the level's features to you, even when you're on your 20th attempt in a row and *know perfectly well how the dynamite works, you ridiculously irritating fu-! (Medicine time! Uncle Stu will see you all next time, readers! – Ed)*



» You'll never get to use this jetpack, tragically.



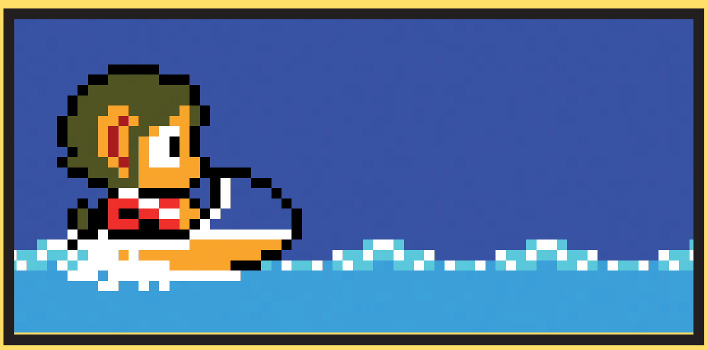
» Every one of those '?' squares will result in the game stopping and telling you stuff that in all probability it told you at the start of the level anyway. And if you finish a level with, say, 58 out of a maximum 61 diamonds, the game will say "That was perfect!", which it *clearly* wasn't. Grrr.

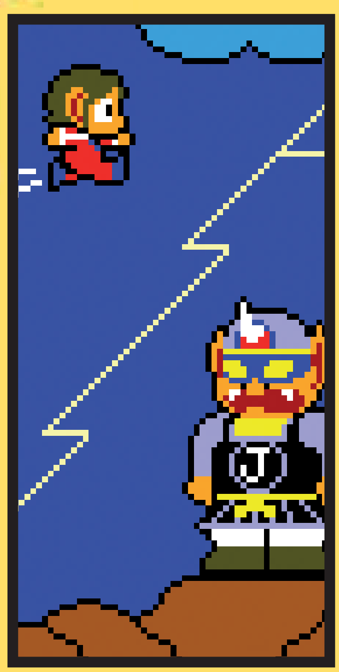




ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD



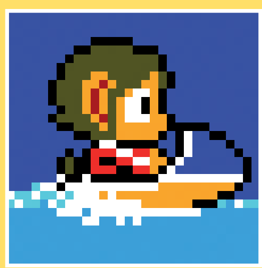




Alex Kidd was born into war. With big ears, a red jumpsuit and a blatant inability to stay inside one videogame genre for any longer than five minutes, his story is one of woe. Playing second fiddle to an Italian plumber before being ousted by a plucky hedgehog, it's generally regarded that it was this big-fisted monkey boy that Sega would first look towards to parry the piquancy of Nintendo's everyman mascot.

Join Stuart Hunt as he flicks on his Master System II, laughs at the fools blowing into their *Super Mario Bros* carts, and enjoys the original idle-man's platform game: *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*.

THE VEHICLES



Speedboat

The speedboat is the last vehicle you come across in the game. It's not as skittish as the motorbike but watch out for those green flying fish; otherwise it's into a pool of frustration you go.



Peticopter

The peticopter is the only vehicle that you can keep hold of for more than ten seconds. You gain height by tapping the B button, but be careful not to hit your rotors against red circles or it'll blow up.



Motorbike

The first vehicle you'll experience in the game ploughs effortlessly through boulders, scorpions and frogs but has a bit of a problem with floating red bubbles or beanstalks.

PUSH START BUTTON

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

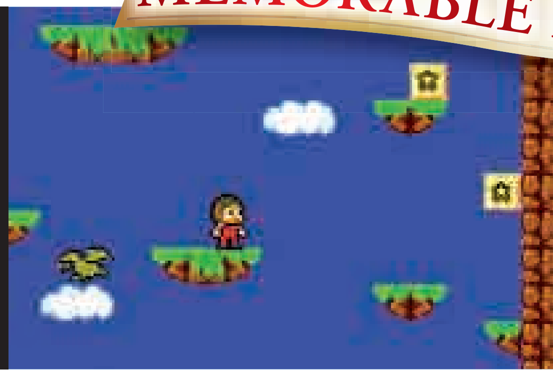
WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's Free-ish

You can't even mouth the words 'Sega Master System' without someone wistfully mentioning 'remember that free game about the tracksuit-wearing monkey boy who could be found squatting inside the machine'. *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* may not have felt as smooth as *Super Mario Bros*, but with the game's vehicles, its numerous power-ups, shops and horizontal and vertical scrolling, Sega would dazzle gamers with a colourful-looking rhapsody to show up Mario's linearity and the visual 8-bit superiority of the Sega Master System. The fact that it came built into the machine only helped secure it's notoriety and classic status.

BEST CHARACTER



Alex Kidd

Alex Kidd had all the trappings of a true underdog. He dressed like a gymnast, his mum clearly cut his hair and it seemed that anything sprouting from his cheekbones (sideburns and ears) would grow to gargantuan sizes. But Alex Kidd was also as tough as an ox (actually as the game proves, he's actually tougher), he could break rocks with his bare hands and he even managed to get the act of doing so named after something from the Karma Sutra: the 'Shellcore technique'. But what do you expect, this kid has fists the size of piglets and he's a prince (which might explain those rather big ears).

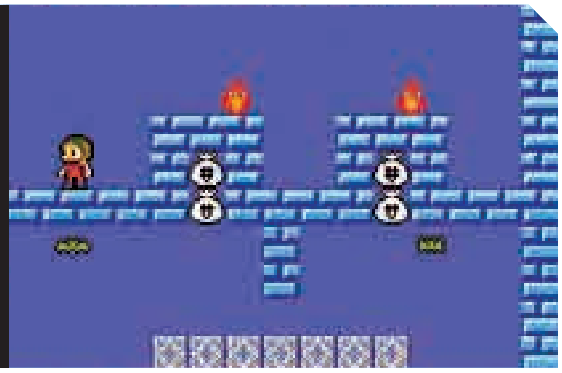
BEST POWER-UP



The Bracelet

Putting our rose-tinted spectacles away for a moment, it must be said that *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* represented a pretty erroneous challenge. It had some very cheap gameplay elements, such as random luck, and its infuriating last stage is helped none by Alex, who, like most kids, enjoys sliding around the floor. While this might be fun and entertaining on polished dance floors at family discos, in Radactian – a place that seems to fill its boots with peril, frogmen and vultures – it sucks. So it's a real blessing when you break that prize box and uncover a bracelet that lets Alex fire Sonic Booms and kill stuff from a safe distance.

BEST STAGE



Radactian Castle

If we're completely honest, despite what the game's colourful mid-stage map would have you believe, there's not much that really differentiates the 11 areas of Radactian – they all feel incredibly similar. If we had to put a finger on one particularly memorable section of the game, it would probably be the first castle that you encounter in the game – the Radactian Castle – as the blue brickwork comes as a welcome breath of fresh air to your eyesight after all the random floating boulders and peculiar red, vehicle-hating circles you've been encountering in the game up until that point.

BEST BOSS



Janken the Great

The final boss is a real oddity. First, his name translates as 'Rock, Paper, Scissors the Great', and second he never moves. Not once. None of the Janken-match bosses move in fact, they just stand motionless, teaching you the ancient art of mime. You can easily kill the bosses Parplin, Chokkina and Gooseka by hopping over their bodies as they lob their heads at you and punching them in the back of the dome when it makes the trip back to its shoulders. This trick is ineffective against Janken though; to beat him you need to stand under his chin, which protects you from his stone attack and punch him in the forehead a few times.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Playing Janken

Forget stupid attack patterns or laughable end-of-level bullet eaters that seriously take the cash, patience and piss, here Sega has tried to employ a nuance of creativity to *Alex Kidd*'s boss battles by having most of them playing you at rock, paper, scissors before they try to maim you with their heads. Of course, the problem is that unless you purchase yourself a handy Crystal Ball from the shop in the game, or repeatedly play through the game and jot down the order (which never changes) that Janken's three odd-looking henchmen make their selections, then you're basically stuffed.



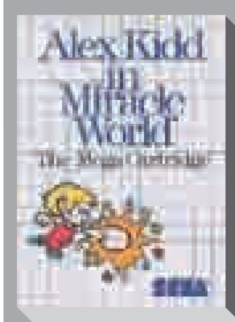
What the mags said… ages ago

'S' Magazine

"A superb arcade adventure, which you'll keep going back to until the quest is at an end. No matter what games style you prefer, *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* is deserving of a place in your collection (why else would they build it into the Master System II?)." **93%**

What we think

S magazine may have been a tad blinkered by the mesmerising colours of *Alex Kidd*. It's certainly a classic game, packed full of great aspects and innovation, but time has exposed the overtly bullish controls and sporadic difficulty spikes. **85%**



IN THE KNOW

- **SYSTEM:** MASTER SYSTEM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

GUARDIANS OF THE 'HOOD

AND YOU THOUGHT PIT-FIGHTER WAS COMPLETE AND UTTER RUBBISH...



- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ PCB



HISTORY

Issue 51's Retro Gamer duly lambasted Atari Games' *Pit-Fighter* for being the steaming heap of digital tosh that it truly is. Amazingly though, we've actually managed to find a game that's even worse. Step forward *Guardians Of The 'Hood.*

Created by Atari Games for its G42 hardware – the only other game to appear on the short-lived technology was *Road Riot 4WD* – *Guardians Of The 'Hood* is the best proof ever that digitised graphics should never, ever, ever be allowed in videogames. Ever.

If you thought *Pit-Fighter*'s jerky animation, creepy-looking visuals and non-existent gameplay was bad, then just wait until you see this bad boy in motion. Characters move around like something out of a low-budget cartoon – think *Family Guy*, when Peter Griffin hears its budget is being cut. Collision detection has been put in as an afterthought and normally comes down to whoever's quick enough to get in the first punch, while the monotonous gameplay will just make you want to stab something into your face.

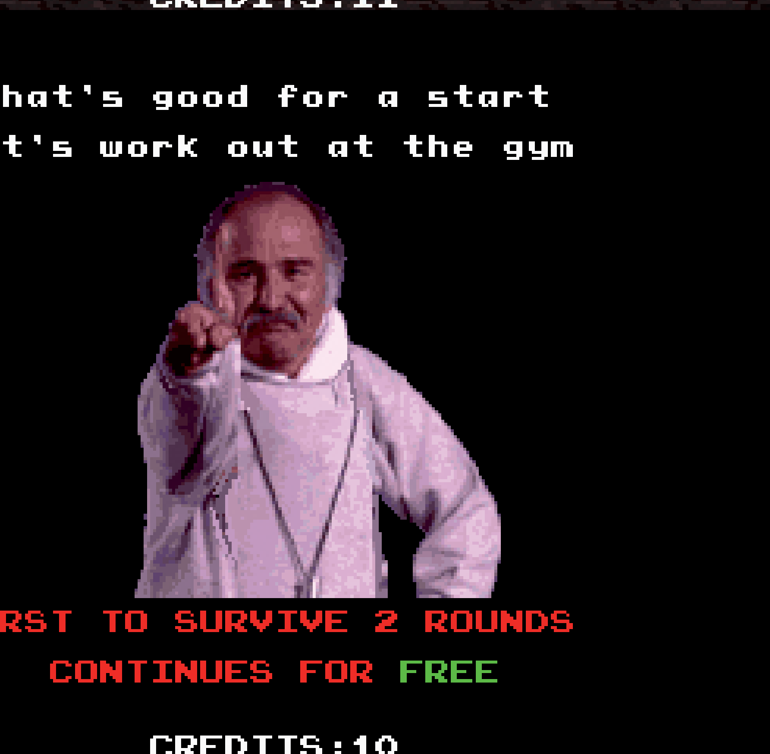
Although the vast majority of *Guardians*' naff gameplay will see you scrapping your way through the digital streets of Center City, you'll be occasionally requested to step into a gym for a horrendously poor one-on-one scrap. These are perhaps the worst sections of all, for if you're trying to play through *Guardians* with a friend, the loser of the bout is going to have to pay extra money in order to continue. Of course, it could be argued that you're going to lose friends if you introduce them to *Guardians* anyway, but it still manages to smart that Atari was so willing to take your hard-earned cash.

In fact, the only, ever so slightly impressive aspect of *Guardians* is that beating the bosses at the end of each stage then gives you the option of playing as them at the start of a new level. It's a nice touch, but not nice enough to make up for playing the damned game in the first place.




JAVIER
60
MAUBY
PACIFIC LOAN CO.
TIME
173
LEFT
CREDITS:11


CONNER
22830
PEBBLES
JAY-JAY
25880
PEBBLES
STASH YOUR TRASH
BEAT THE
SHAVERS
WAVE 4
TIME
189
LEFT
CREDITS: 2


hat's good for a start
t's work out at the gym
RST TO SURVIVE 2 ROUNDS
CONTINUES FOR FREE
CREDITS:10


CHIEF
4805
JAVIER
5030
ROUND
1
TIME
45
LEFT
CREDITS:10


TANYA
19250
JAY-JAY
CREDITS: 3


CONNER
7005
NIGEL
JAVIER
8950
NIGEL
BEAT THE
DREADS
TIME
163
LEFT
CREDITS: 9



"AS WITH THE PC-ENGINE, HUDSON PROVIDED THE CUSTOM CHIPSET, WHILE NEC WOULD BRING ITS CONSIDERABLE ELECTRONICS PRODUCTION EXPERIENCE TO THE TABLE"

PC-FX

AS THE 16-BIT GENERATION DREW TO A SLOW AND AGONISING CLOSE THE INDUSTRY WITNESSED A CHAOTIC STAMPEDE OF SHINY NEW CONSOLES, SOME OF WHICH WERE MARKEDLY MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN OTHERS. DAMIEN MCFERRAN TAKES A LOOK AT ONE OF THE MORE HIGH-PROFILE BLUNDERS OF THE ERA

ACCESSORISE **Three peripherals every PC-FX owner shouldn't be without**



PC-FX Pad (FX-PAD)
A lovely six-button pad that is almost identical to the controller that came with the PC-Engine Duo RX. This is very comfortable and ranks as one of the finest pads of its generation – shame hardly anyone got to experience it.



PC-FX Mouse (FX-MOU)
Compatible with only a handful of games, the FX-MOU still made many PC-FX gaming sessions more palatable. As was standard at the time it only had two buttons, but that was plenty for the few games that supported it.



Memory Card (FX-BMP)
The PC-FX had 32K of internal RAM for save games, which filled up quickly. Therefore, this memory card was an essential purchase for serious gamers, especially those who favoured the large number of RPGs on the system.

Year released: 1994

Original price: 50,000¥ (£240)

Buy it now for: £50-£100

Why the PC-FX was great… It may have lacked 3D power and was plagued with questionable anime software, but the PC-FX is still a firm favourite with serious retro collectors. FMV gaming may have been forgotten these days but NEC and Hudson's machine was the undisputed master of the medium, even managing to make the genre playable and entertaining. The limited library (coupled with the relatively unknown nature of the platform) makes this the ideal choice for budding retro connoisseurs with deep pockets who wish to dip their toes into the Japanese end of the market.

Complacency can be deadly. You only have to look at the changeover between the 16-bit and 32/64-bit generations for confirmation of this fact; amazingly, during this period of transition all of the established hardware manufacturers were caught with their trousers down while new boy Sony waded in and effortlessly mopped up their precious market share. Poor old Sega stumbled badly, first with the ill-advised 32X and then with the Saturn, and while Nintendo's fall from grace was slightly less pronounced few would have the confidence to declare that the N64 lived up to the lofty expectations established by the tremendous success of its predecessor, the SNES.

However, by far the most humiliating collapse was that of NEC and its cohort Hudson Soft. These two companies had previously worked together on the legendary 8-bit PC-Engine, which in Japan had managed to beat Sega's Mega Drive into third place and even went as far as to challenge Nintendo's previously unassailable dominance. Unfortunately, like their fellow rivals they drastically underestimated the challenge posed by creating a successor to such outrageously popular hardware.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves here; there's a history lesson to brush up on first. As previously mentioned, NEC and Hudson's partnership had proven to be a particularly profitable one and it was almost a given that the dynamic duo would collaborate on new projects together again. Work on what would become known as 'Tetsujin' (Iron Man in Japanese) commenced almost as soon as the Nineties had begun, with an official announcement coming as early as 1992. As had been the case with the PC-Engine, Hudson provided the custom chipset (which included five separate co-processors) while NEC would bring its considerable electronics production experience to the table.

Tetsujin boasted fearsome specifications for the time. Not only was it to be CD-ROM based, it also contained a RISC processor clocked at 25MHz and was supported by 2MB of RAM to facilitate speedy CD access. The system also featured highly advanced 2D capabilities as well as support for full-screen 24-bit video playback. A prototype was demonstrated to selected parties in the same year, with three games being displayed. Two of these were merely tech demos but the third got delegates really hot under the collar; it was an updated version of Hudson's classic *Star Soldier*, which ran in what appeared to be full 3D. In reality it was actually displaying 3D objects over a pre-rendered background (the same technique employed by GameArts' *Silpheed* on the Mega CD and Namco's *Starblade* in the arcades), but it was more than enough to impress the assembled throng and with a successful demonstration of their new hardware out of the way NEC and Hudson feverishly worked on getting the new machine ready for release.

INSTANT EXPERT

The PC-FX uses 32K of internal RAM for save games. Many games feature unique warning messages alerting the player when this memory is full.

Hi-Ten Bomberman – a ten-player version of Hudson's famous title – was rumoured to be in development for the system but was cancelled. Many believe this formed the basis for the Saturn's sublime *Bomberman*.

In keeping with NEC's vision of technological convergence, a modem was mooted for the PC-FX but never saw the light of day.

Although the PC-FX joypad was aesthetically the same as the one bundled with the PC-Engine Duo RX, the auto-fire switches became 'mode' switches, which let players change the mapping of the pad's buttons instantly.

Hudson and NEC's software publishing policy favoured a heavy bias towards anime-style games and 'digital comics', both of which were popular in Japan at the time.

Only 62 games were officially released for the PC-FX during its three-and-a-half-year life span.

Early releases came in attractive plastic boxes, not totally dissimilar to the ones used for the Neo-Geo AES, but as time went on NEC reverted to cheaper (and a lot less attractive) standard CD jewel cases.

The three expansion ports of the PC-FX were apparently included because NEC and Hudson were keen to avoid the endless and confusing string of upgrades that had so befuddled prospective PC-Engine owners.

The PC-FX's 'FX-BMP' memory card is powered by two AAA batteries.

The three expansion slots on the PC-FX each had a special purpose. The front slot housed the FX-BMP memory card, the one at the rear was for the SCSI cable and the remaining bay was for the proposed 3D card.



AARON NANTO INTERVIEW

PC-Engine FX (http://pcenginefx.com/PC-FX) is unquestionably the internet's leading resource on all things PC-FX, showcasing a fine selection of images, reviews, videos and other related media. We spoke to webmaster Aaron Nanto (who is the proud owner of a complete PC-FX collection) about NEC's 32-bit console.

■ Retro Gamer: What do you find so appealing about the PC-FX?
Aaron Nanto: The PC-FX is unlike any other console for two reasons – the games and the design of the system. The PC-FX is the only console that utilised motion JPEG technology for its primary purpose to give you 'real-time' control of full-motion video. This allowed for fighting games like *Battle Heat*, where you controlled your character via FMV sequences that reacted instantly to your button presses. Other consoles back in the day had FMV games, but nothing as fast or high quality as what the PC-FX could do. The other unique feature of the PC-FX is the design of the console – the PC-FX is the only game console to be designed like a mini-tower computer with three expansion ports.

■ RG: Why do you think the PC-FX failed to sell in Japan?
AN: The reason why the PC-FX didn't sell that well in Japan was due to the games and the fact that it didn't support backward compatibility with the PC-Engine. NEC took a radically different approach to what types of games were released for the PC-FX and this was undoubtedly a major factor in the failure of the console. Gone were the arcade conversions, shooters and platform games from the PC-Engine – NEC instead gave gamers original IPs, FMV versions of old classics and anime games.

■ RG: Do you think the hardware was exploited to its fullest potential during the PC-FX's short life span?
AN: The PC-FX hardware was definitely not exploited to its fullest potential before support was pulled for the console. For the majority of the games, we saw 2D sprites and FMV – but the PC-FX had the potential to display 3D graphics to a certain extent and we saw just a hint of that in the game *Zenki*.

■ RG: Can you tell us a bit about the expandability aspect of the machine? Is it true that a 3D card was proposed that would allow it to compete with consoles like the Saturn and PlayStation?
AN: The PC-FX had a huge amount of expansion options that were not exploited during the short life of the console. Unfortunately, we will never know what NEC might have done to expand the console – a 3D card could have been a possibility, as with memory expansion or even adding a modem. However, the only item that utilised the expansion ports was the FX-BMP, which provided more save-game memory.

■ RG: How easy is it to collect for the machine today?
AN: Due to the limited market of the unit (Japan only) and low amount of games produced, people who want to start collecting the PC-FX will have a very hard time acquiring many of the games – the prices can be quite steep. The console and accessories are fairly easy to find on the used market but the games will take a much longer time to collect. Personally, it took about five years to collect every PC-FX game for my own collection, and this was many years ago – it is much harder now!

■ RG: How much does a PC-FX unit sell for these days?
AN: The PC-FX console itself you can find on eBay for about $100 (£50), but most times it will have to be shipped from Japan and that can be another $40+ (£20+) just for shipping.

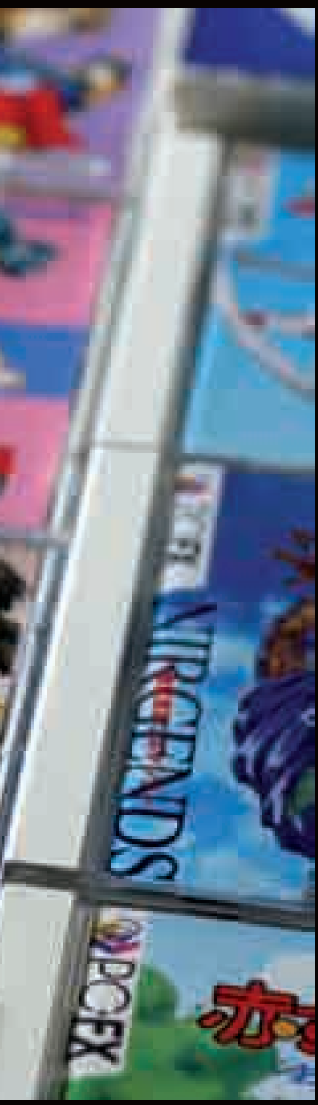
■ RG: Given the Japanese nature of the machine's games, how easy is it for English-speaking gamers to get to grips with the PC-FX and its software?
AN: There is only a small selection of games that non-Japanese players can enjoy, which means that if you can't understand Japanese, this console might not be for you considering the cost involved in acquiring the games.



Initially the two companies were confident of launching Tetsujin in 1992, but lack of finished software forced a rethink and spring 1993 became the target date. When this was also missed, rumours began to circulate that NEC and Hudson were reluctant to usurp the PC-Engine while it was still pulling in good business (in Japan, at least). As the months passed Tetsujin became less and less cutting-edge and it seems that during this time little development was undertaken to ensure the new hardware retained parity with newer machines like the 3DO and Atari Jaguar; NEC and Hudson seemed content to rest on their collective laurels, at least while their current hardware was still viable.

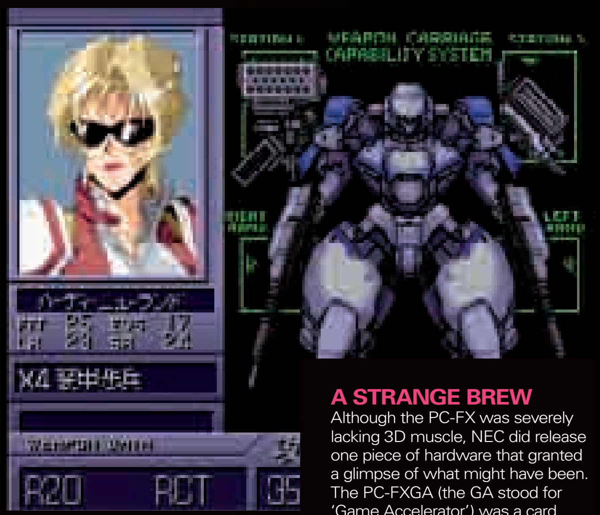
Then, in early 1994, it was confirmed that the Tetsujin project had been formally cancelled. Sources insisted that development had been abandoned due to NEC and Hudson seeing the proposed specs for Sega and Sony's 32-bit challengers, both of which outshone Tetsujin and also promised considerable 3D capability. In light of such competition the partners were forced to scurry back to the drawing board. Sadly, it was far too late to come up with an entirely new design and therefore much of the architecture that was present in the (by now) hopelessly underpowered Tetsujin was utilised in the new machine. Although Hudson's five-piece custom graphics chipset was streamlined to just a single co-processor, Tetsujin's reliance on streamed footage rather than real-time rendering was retained. The working title for this new platform was 'FX', which soon became PC-FX – the 'PC' presumably being added to capitalise on the prominence the PC-Engine brand was enjoying in Japan at the time. Despite this name checking, it was confirmed early on that this new device would not be backward compatible with existing PC-Engine CD-ROM software.

The PC-FX console finally made its worldwide debut at the 1994 Tokyo Toy Show where it fought with the Saturn, PlayStation, Neo-Geo CD and





» Launch title *Team Innocent* used pre-rendered backgrounds in a similar fashion to Capcom's *Resident Evil*.





» Running on the Tetsujin hardware, this update of Hudson's popular *Star Soldier* franchise used pre-rendered backgrounds and 3D ships.

A STRANGE BREW

Although the PC-FX was severely lacking 3D muscle, NEC did release one piece of hardware that granted a glimpse of what might have been. The PC-FXGA (the GA stood for 'Game Accelerator') was a card that could be installed on a PC (or on a PC-98, which was NEC's own personal computer standard in Japan) and used to develop 3D homebrew titles. Some intriguing demos were also bundled with the card and while they're hardly breathtaking by the standards of the era, it at least gives a hint of the kind of 3D power that the system could have enjoyed. Sadly, because NEC's proposed 3D expansion card for the home console never materialised, anything produced using the PC-FXGA was unplayable on the standard PC-FX. Still, this is a pretty unique piece of kit and is fairly desirable in the eyes of serious collectors.



Bandai Playdia for the attention of the masses. The unconventional casing design immediately caused tongues to waggle, with many commentators unfavourably comparing it to the rather unflattering PC towers that were available at the time. Nevertheless, attendees at the show were left open-mouthed by *FX Fighter*, a title shrewdly positioned to steal the thunder of Sega's *Virtua Fighter* arcade conversion, which also happened to be on display. Hudson's game looked nothing short of stunning, boasting highly detailed combatants constructed of smoothly shaded polygons. It certainly put Sega's boxy effort to shame, but there was a significant catch: the PC-FX was in fact spooling pre-rendered footage directly from the CD and not actually generating these images in real-time. It wasn't immediately apparent at the time but the system lacked dedicated 3D hardware and this effectively meant that it couldn't hope to compete with the Saturn and PlayStation in this regard. In their defence, neither NEC nor Hudson ever insisted that the footage was real-time rendering; it was rather the assumption of those that viewed the demonstration that perpetuated this viewpoint. Nevertheless, magazines picked up on the impressive footage and this contributed to the expectation surrounding the launch of the console.

However, when the PC-FX eventually hit Japanese store shelves in December 1994 the mystique surrounding its 3D muscle swiftly evaporated. *FX Fighter* was nowhere to be seen, although leading launch title *Battle Heat* proved to be a very similar proposition. It was essentially a *Dragon's Lair*-style anime fighting game where animated sequences were spooled off the disc in time with the player's button commands. To be fair, it was (and still is) an awesomely impressive trick; there is no delay between the player's input and on-screen action and the quality of the FMV is tremendous. This is thanks to the fact that NEC and Hudson had decided to shun traditional MPEG video playback (which resulted in low quality compressed footage with lots of pixelation and a generally low frame rate) in favour of the much more memory-intensive JPEG system, which essentially displayed a different high-quality still image for each frame of animation, and all at a silky-smooth rate of 30 frames per second. Because it was built on the foundations of Project Tetsujin, the console was therefore constructed from the outset to make use of this unique method. Tetsuya Iguchi, a member of NEC's Electronic Products planning department, proudly stated that the PC-FX was a 'Direct Memory Access' machine. Instead of pushing data from the CD through the CPU bus, the PC-FX channelled the information directly to the video-out port via a sequencer, rendering chip and video encoding processor. This process allowed the machine to produce blisteringly fast video footage, and it should come as no surprise to learn that the console eventually became a hotbed of anime-style games.

> "IT WAS HARD TO IGNORE THAT THE SATURN AND PLAYSTATION OFFERED CUTTING-EDGE 3D VISUALS FOR THE SAME PRICE"

However, for all this FMV-related trickery, it was hard to ignore that the Saturn and PlayStation were bringing cutting-edge 3D visuals to homes for the



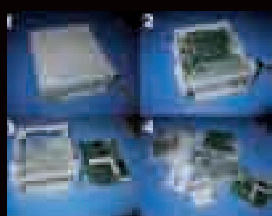




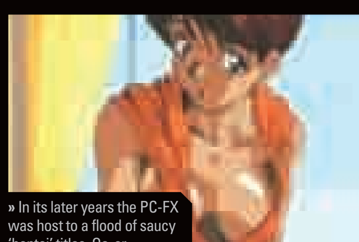
» You're going to have to spend some serious cash for a complete PC-FX collection.

EVERYTHING PUT TOGETHER FALLS APART

Compared to rival machines, the PC-FX is a pretty hefty beast, but you may wonder just how much of the space inside that bulky casing is taken up by actual hardware. One PC-FX owner also found himself pondering this troublesome question and so he disassembled his beloved console, piece by piece. Amazingly, he discovered that the PC-FX is mostly full of air, with the actual circuit board and electronics taking up only a tiny percentage of the internal real estate. Naturally, much of this space would have been swallowed up by the proposed upgrades, which would have occupied the areas within the expansion slots. For those of you with strong stomachs, the grisly results of this machine dissection can be seen here: http://nfggames.com/forum2/index.php?topic=1305. Whatever you do, don't try this at home, kids.





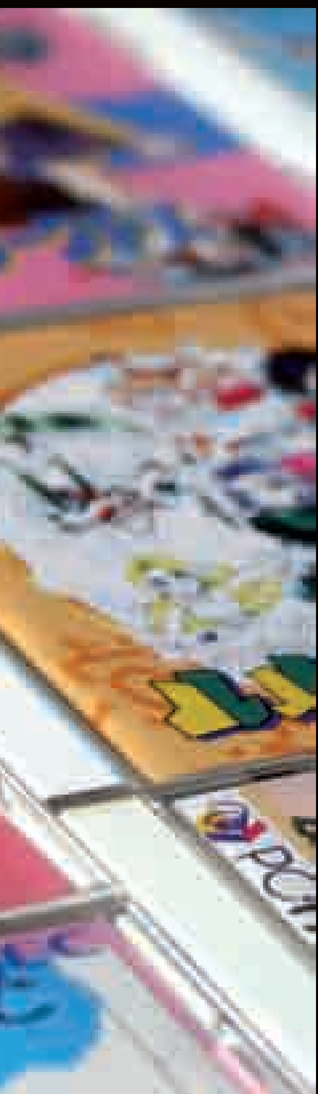


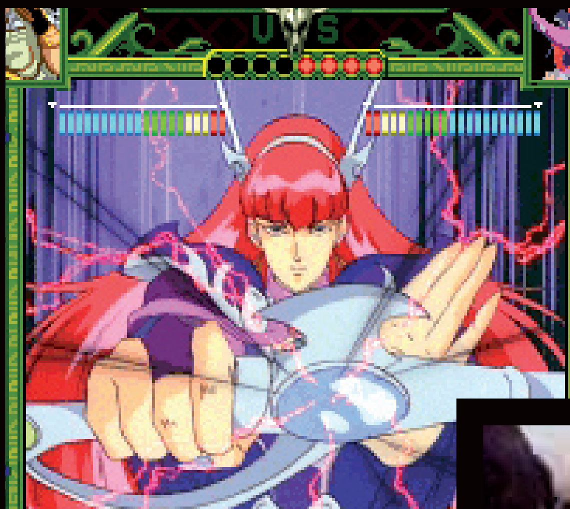
» In its later years the PC-FX was host to a flood of saucy 'hentai' titles. Oo-er.

same retail price, making the PC-FX look massively underpowered as a result. But it wasn't just technical issues that PC-FX owners had to deal with; software support was equally disappointing. The much-hyped *FX Fighter* was quietly cancelled and in a move that with the benefit of hindsight appears particularly foolhardy, Hudson established publishing guidelines that stipulated that famous titles such as *Bomberman* and *Adventure Island* would not be developed for the system. Perhaps the company was attempting to prove that the PC-FX was too advanced to host these seemingly simplistic games; whatever the reason for this puzzling stance, it meant that the console was fighting without the aid of Hudson's most potent weaponry – its best-selling franchises.

However, even in the darkness a few faint glimmers of light could be seen. Games such as *Chip Chan Kick!*, *Der Langrisser FX* and *Kishin Doji Zenki: Vajura Fight* managed to ignite the interest of gamers the world over, with *Zenki*'s exhilarating mixture of gorgeous 2D visuals and addictive gameplay almost providing enough justification for numerous enthusiasts to purchase a PC-FX purely to play it. Many of the anime FMV games were actually remarkably entertaining and very nearly succeeded in making what was previously a laughable genre appear almost worthwhile. For all its faults, NEC's machine was certainly adept at creating attractive 2D videogames and could handle FMV with remarkable proficiency, but sadly NEC and Hudson had simply backed the wrong horse – 3D was the next big thing, as the runaway success of the PlayStation would attest.

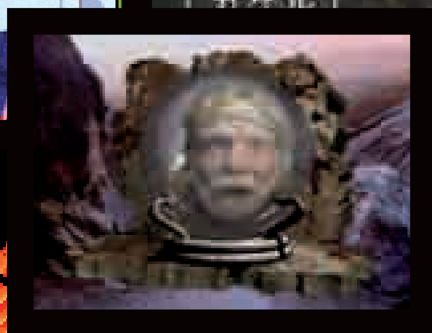
Like so many other machines of the era, the PC-FX was billed as a 'multimedia' device as well as a gaming platform. The PC tower casing – so







» How could you not want to play a game where a big-eyed girl gets tied up?







» Unfortunately, many PC-FX games require a good knowledge of Japanese to play.



at odds with conventional console design, which favoured machines that spread themselves horizontally rather than vertically – may not have been to everybody's tastes, but it arguably gave the PC-FX a mature, almost professional look. The ability to receive (but not send) faxes was an innovative attempt to introduce the kind of online connectivity we now take for granted with machines like the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3; indeed, prior to the console's release Tetsuya Iguchi spoke of forging a link between different electronic products, such personal computers and telecommunications systems. The machine featured ports for future expandability and although the only peripheral to make use of this was the FX-BMP game save memory module, there were rumours that a fully-fledged 3D graphics card was in the works that would have allowed the PC-FX to compete toe to toe with Sony and Sega's machines. Music CD and Photo CD playback was also supported and in a rather novel move the console could be connected to a PC-98 personal computer via a special SCSI adapter and function as a CD-ROM drive.

However, as innovative as these features may have been, they counted for little in the face of more technically potent rivals. Bolstered by impressive capability and sterling support from publishers, the PlayStation quickly ran away with the majority of the market leaving the competition in its wake. The PC-FX hardly figured in the scheme of things; sales were pitiful, with less than 100,000 units sold after a year – compare this to the performance of the PlayStation, which had shifted over a million units in Japan by this stage. Amazingly, these figures might not have come as much of a surprise to NEC as it would appear the company's aspirations were low from the beginning, with Iguchi being quoted as saying he expected the PC-FX to sell "around 50,000" units in 1994 and another 50,000 in the following year.

As things became increasingly fraught, NEC opened the floodgates on what many would consider to be the console's lasting legacy – dubious 'hentai' dating simulations featuring wide-eyed schoolgirls in provocative poses. But even before this occurred, the acutely Japanese nature of the software had effectively spelt an end to what little chance there had been of a Western release. It could be argued that after the dismal performance of the TurboGrafx-16 (the American version of the PC-Engine), NEC wasn't going to make the same mistake twice, but had the PC-FX been a success in its homeland, the probability of it reaching Western shores would have been much greater.

Nevertheless, the PC-FX did manage to carve out a niche for itself in Japan and hung onto a tiny market share for over three years. The final release (called *First Kiss Story* – you guessed it, a dating simulator) limped onto Japanese shelves in April 1998. Rumours circulated that other games (including a highly anticipated update of Hudson's classic *Far East Of Eden* series) were awaiting development "dependent on market performance", but this was effectively the end of the road for the PC-FX – a console that was outdated from the moment it went on sale. It was a bitterly disappointing outcome and a far cry from the triumphant legacy left by the PC-Engine; it also spelt the end of NEC and Hudson's previously fruitful relationship.

(Many thanks to Aaron Nanto for providing exclusive hardware and software photography.)

PC-FX

PERFECT TEN GAMES

With just over 60 titles to choose from and the vast majority of those being dating simulators incomprehensible to anyone that doesn't know Japanese, picking the ten best games for the PC-FX is harder than you might imagine, but here at **Retro Gamer** we relish a challenge.



01



02

BATTLE HEAT

» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TEAM INNOCENT

01 **Easily the most** impressive of the three titles that launched with the PC-FX, *Battle Heat* is also the best illustration of how FMV gaming almost became acceptable. Looking every inch like a *Fist Of The North Star* anime movie, players must press buttons in order to pull off moves and if successful the resultant attack is displayed instantly via an animated sequence. Players can also counterattacks before they connect and therefore alter the chain of events. Lightning-fast transitions and no pauses between the sequences create an experience you have to try at least once. It may not hold a candle to 'true' fighting games, but it remains a thoroughly entertaining diversion nonetheless; it's also cheap and easy to locate these days, too.

CHIP CHAN KICK!

» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GALAXY FRAULEIN YUNA FX

02 **Playing like the** long-lost relative of Taito's *Parasol Stars* and *Bubble Bobble*, *Chip Chan Kick!* is a highly enjoyable single-screen platform romp featuring wide-eyed anime protagonists and super-colourful level design. If there was ever a game to prove that the NEC's machine was a serious contender in the 2D arena, then this is it – the presentation is gorgeous and the game drips with infectiously cute character and charm. The music is also worthy of note, adding immensely to the slapstick atmosphere. Unsurprisingly, as one of the few traditional action games available for the system this is worth a lot these days but represents one of the more accessible and downright fun releases for the PC-FX.

DER LANGRISSER FX

» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PUBLISHED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **CREATED BY:** NCS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GLEY LANCER (MEGA DRIVE)

03 **This criminally undervalued** turn-based strategy series was only localised for Western consumption once (the first Mega Drive title was released by Treco under the name *Warsong* in the early Nineties), but it nevertheless enjoyed a healthy following in its native Japan right up to the PlayStation/Saturn era. This is essentially an updated version of the sublime second Mega Drive game with the added bonus of some lovely CD-quality tunes and a polished anime intro, which really showcases the talents of character designer Satoshi Urushihara (*Plastic Little*, *Legend Of Lemnear*).

KISHIN DOJI ZENKI: VAJURA FIGHT

» **RELEASED:** 1995
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER POWER LEAGUE FX

04 **When it was** released in 1995 this astonishingly brilliant game provided many gamers with a reason to shell out their hard-earned cash on a PC-FX. A side-scrolling 2D action platformer with a particular emphasis on impressive combat with nasty-type supernatural demons, *Zenki* contains some astounding set pieces that seamlessly combine FMV with large, well-animated 2D sprites and even a brief smattering of 3D. *Zenki* provides a tantalising glimpse of what the PC-FX was really capable of; it's a crying shame that more games like this weren't released during its life span.

TYOUSHIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR

» **RELEASED:** 1997
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MEGAMI PARADISE II

05 **Considering the embarrassing** abundance of shooters that happened to find their way onto the PC-Engine, it's quite shocking to think that this fine effort constitutes the PC-FX's sole 2D blaster. Like *Zenki*, this title proves just how competent the machine is at handling intensely crafted 2D action, with large numbers of highly detailed sprites zipping around the screen with no hint of slowdown whatsoever. While it's debatable that *Zeroigar* is up there with the PC Engine's finest 2D shooters, it's certainly an essential PC-FX purchase – if you can find a cheap copy **that is.**



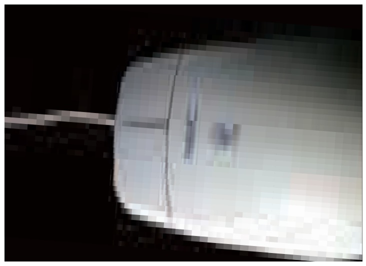
03



04



05





06



07



08

FARLAND STORY FX

» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPARKLING FEATHER

06 **Like Langrisser, this** is another instance of an existing strategy-RPG franchise being subtly updated to utilise the additional power of the PC-FX. Similar to Sega's *Shining Force* and Nintendo's *Fire Emblem* series, *Farland Story FX* is one of the more aesthetically pleasing titles available for NEC's console, with some gorgeous artwork and character design. The action takes place over a 2D battlefield with combat switching to a side-on view whenever an enemy is encountered. Everything is very polished and the language barrier doesn't prove to be too much of an issue, so this is worth considering if you hanker for some RPG action.

LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE

» **RELEASED:** 1997
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** NIHON APPLICATION
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ENGACHO! (WONDERSWAN)

07 **While Last Imperial** *Prince* certainly has its faults, it still warrants investigation if you're a fan of action RPG titles. The visuals are generally excellent throughout and some suitably atmospheric cut-scenes help push the engaging story along nicely. In terms of gameplay, it's not a million miles away from the likes of *Zelda II* and *Princess Crown*. Naturally, all the text is in Japanese but with a bit of trial and error you can still make good progress. Unquestionably rough around the edges, this nevertheless proves to be a nice diversion from the endless dating simulators that populate the machine's library.

TENGAI MAKYOU: KARAKURI KAKUTODEN

» **RELEASED:** 1995
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WAKUSEI-KOUGEKITAI LITTLE CATS

08 **Essentially using the** same game engine as *Battle Heat*, *Tengai Makyou* is based on the *Far East Of Eden* series of games, which was a massive hit for Hudson Soft on the PC-Engine. The mechanics of the game are fundamentally the same with button presses activating pre-rendered move sequences, but there's also a lot more humour at work here and the game benefits from better quality animation and tighter gameplay. Sadly, *Tengai Makyou Karakuri Kakutoden* is much harder to locate than its fairly common stable mate.



09

FIRE WOMAN MATOIGUMI

» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** TOKUME SHOTEN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ZOKU HATUKOI MONOGATARI

09 **It may only be** a dating game but *Fire Woman Matoigumi* is a cut above other examples available on the PC-FX. Naturally, you assume the role of a new high-school student but refreshingly this game doesn't force you to endure endless static storytelling screens, as is the case with so many other games on the system. Instead you're given a surprisingly free reign and the game is constantly evolving and changing, with a massive school campus to explore and investigate. As you might imagine a small knowledge of Japanese is required to get the most out of *Fire Woman*, but with a bit of patience it's possible for you to enjoy it regardless.

DRAGON KNIGHT 4

» **RELEASED:** 1997
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC HE
» **CREATED BY:** NEC AVENUE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRADUATION REAL

10 **Originally released on** home computers in Japan, the *Dragon Knight* series is infamous for its predilection for buxom nude ladies in highly compromising situations, but people often forget that there's a half decent strategy RPG hidden underneath all of that smut and titillation. Visually this is one of the more attractive PC-FX titles available and it's ably assisted by a moderately deep and engaging battle system, not to mention a half-decent storyline. As is the case with so many of the system's better titles, there's heaps of Japanese text but it is possible to play it even if you don't understand the language – just make sure you're over 18 before loading it up.



10

RETRO SHAMER

HEAD OVER TO THE **RETRO GAMER** FORUM WHERE YOU CAN NOW NOMINATE AND VOTE ON THE GAME YOU WANT TO SEE AS OUR NEXT RETRO SHAMER – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

SUPERMAN 64

MOST PEOPLE REMEMBER THE MAN OF STEEL FOR WEARING HIS PANTS OUTSIDE HIS CLOTHES, BEING PETRIFIED OF MINERALS, AND PICKING ON BALD MEN. RETRO GAMERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, REMEMBER SUPERMAN 64, A GAME WIDELY REGARDED AS THE WORST EVER CREATED. SO, IS IT DESERVING OF SUCH WIDESPREAD RIDICULE? STUART HUNT FINDS OUT

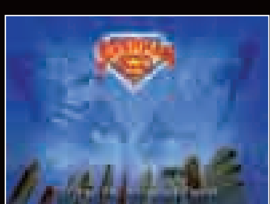


» Is it a turd, is it lame? Yes

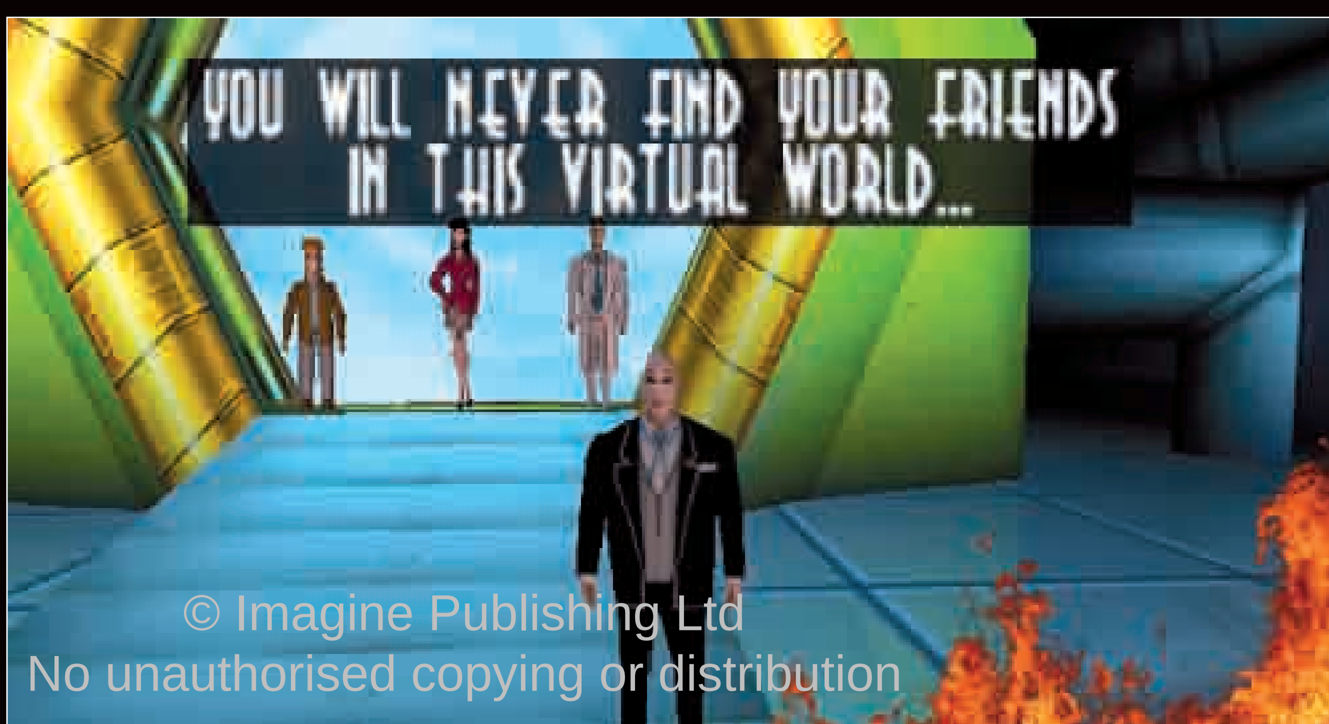


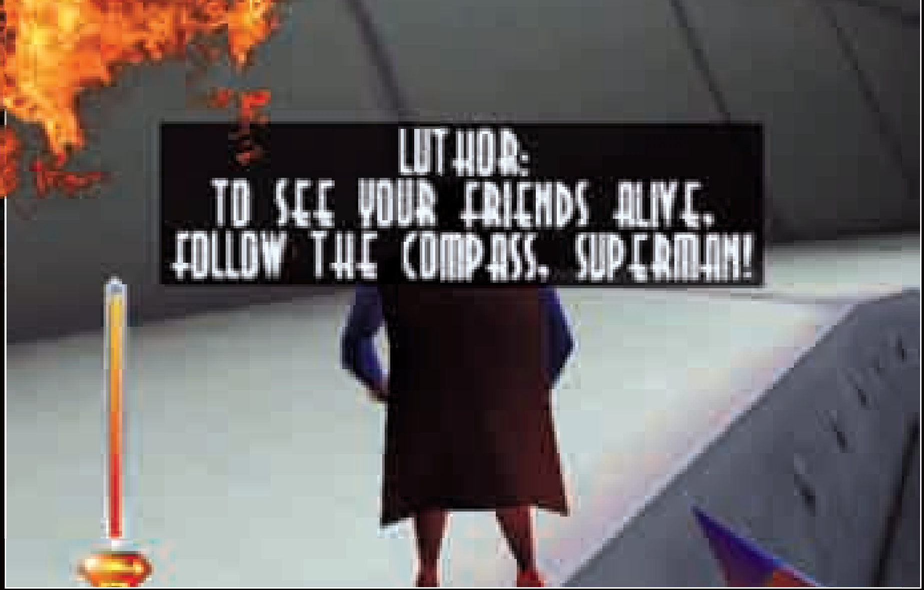
» *Stargate*, it transpires that this piece of N64 detritus is a essentially a sh*t version of *Stargate*.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** TITUS SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **GENRE:** TOILET GIFT
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** WAY, WAY TOO MUCH
» **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** PILOTWINGS





» Play the game on Easy and you don't get any green hula hoops to fly through, instead you have to fly from one section of crap to another with no challenge.

POINTLESS PART

If you dip into *Superman 64*'s Options screen you'll notice that inside sits a pointless display option. It's a completely ridiculous mode that lets you play the game inside a series of progressively smaller letterboxes. There is no point in opting to let play the game in this manner, it simply makes the world's most appalling game 80 per cent worse.



Disbelief is the most prominent emotion, quickly followed by gut-wrenching anger at the fact that someone, somewhere, probably still living among us today, was responsible for inflicting this unfinished tutorial mode of a videogame on the world and expecting us to pay for the privilege.

We've covered some pretty shocking games in Retro Shamer but *Superman 64* is by far the worst we've encountered so far. It starts off bad and goes dramatically downhill from there. It seems Titus Studios constructed ten per cent of a sandbox engine, two per cent of an idea about a game that involved a flying sumo wrestler, and then somehow obtained the Superman licence.

As for a creepy, nightmarish, insane virtual world, Titus excelled by constructing a game that looks like it was built by Doozers and project managed by a dead Fraggle. Watch as childish and shallow buildings materialise before your eyes while our Spandex hero darts around the screen with all the 'super heroism' of a fridge full of gorilla dung. Essentially, *Superman 64* is a long drawn-out tutorial mode that plays like a long drawn-out tutorial mode – in fact, we've played long-drawn out tutorial modes that are better than this entire game.

Four levels, that's it, just four levels were all we could endure of this game before we had to pull the plug. Lex Luthor has imprisoned Superman's friends – Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and some jerk we've never heard of called Professor Hamilton – in a weird portal. You get this peculiar cut-scene of Lex standing in front of Superman waffling on about how he's sending the trio into the virtual bland world and how 'you won't save them'. Instead of burning his face off right there, or even threatening to do so unless he gives up his captors, Superman woefully agrees to enter the realm and the awesome banality begins.

Once inside, Superman must travel through a series of hula hoops at Lex's bequest. Yes the almighty Man of Steel, perhaps the strongest being in the entire DC universe is reduced to conducting menial tasks for Lex's perverse pleasure, which immediately raises a few questions. Why has Lex gone to so much trouble to organise a superhero version of *Pilotwing*'s? Why does Lex even bother to give Superman a window of opportunity to save his friends? And why doesn't he just pull the plug on the virtual world once Superman is inside, thus trapping his nemesis? Also, why are there flashing beacons on the hoops? There are no low-flying planes in the game. Okay, so Superman's controls are erratic and the game is filled with noxious fogging (Kryptonite gas, apparently), but you can't miss the giant hoops even if you try. And why does Lex refer to them as 'mazes' when they're clearly just a series of hoops in a clearly defined order.

The second level is equally perplexing and involves Superman lifting and throwing two cars before they plough into a woman pushing a pram – an embarrassing feat of Superman's powers. And speaking of Superman's powers, he's supposed to be able to travel faster than a speeding bullet. Not in *Superman 64* – here he can just about travel faster than erosion. And he doesn't start out with his ice breath or laser sight; he acquires them by touching icons… and even then he can only use them when a power meter tells him he can.

The missions are all race-against-the-clock affairs. Which is fine, but the clock used – a digital LCD-style timer you'll commonly see somewhere on a Teasmade – is the most hideous blurred timepiece we've ever seen in a game – it's akin to having one of those numberless wristwatches but without any hands. It proves unnecessarily difficult to read.

After we finished the car-tossing mission, we were tasked with flying through more hoops and then given the job of picking up a police car and plonking it down the bottom of a street before some jerks blow it up with a rocket launcher. At this point we couldn't endure any more. Seeing Superman reduced to Lex's lapdog was just too painful to watch. It was like being goaded to take a photograph of Christopher Reeve getting happy-slapped by a wrestler, and almost as painful as seeing him fight Richard Pryor in *Superman III*.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Nothing about this box art is appealing, nothing. The artwork is clearly based on *Superman: The Animated Series*, so on the box we are treated to a picture of Clark making the transformation into Superman drawn in permanent marker and felt tips. No text on the face panel is an interesting notion though – maybe Titus felt showing a picture of a man taking his shirt off was simply all it would take to shift a few Nintendo 64 games.

A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER

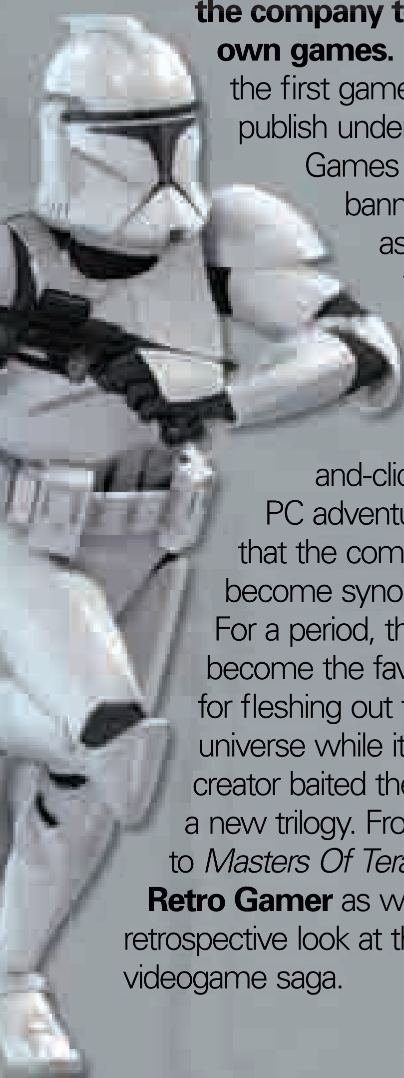
Look, I know exactly what you're going to say. I'm sorry, all right? I just got sick and tired of being so great and powerful and annoyed at Lois for being such a nagging toilet mouth. The pressure of being a journalist and a superhero simply got the better of me. I thought that jumping through hula hoops would be fun, relaxing, and perhaps even recreational. But it isn't. What if I promise to make it up to you all in the upcoming *Mortal Kombat Vs DC Universe* game? Yup, I'll promise not melt everyone's face off within seconds of the match. Honest, I'll hold back, and play up to the cameras a little so the game is playable. I can't say fairer than that now can I?



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF STAR WARS VIDEOGAMES

EPISODE II





It was inevitable that George Lucas would eventually form a games division of Lucasfilm, and what began as a bit of water-testing, alongside industry stalwarts Atari and Epyx, would lead the company to begin publishing its own games. *Maniac Mansion* was the first game Lucasfilm would publish under its Lucasfilm Games videogame banner (now known as LucasArts). It was a game that would come to mark the succinct style of point-and-click text-based PC adventure games that the company would become synonymous with. For a period, the PC would become the favoured platform for fleshing out the *Star Wars* universe while its hirsute creator baited the demand for a new trilogy. From *Dark Forces* to *Masters Of Teras Kasi*, join **Retro Gamer** as we conclude our retrospective look at the *Star Wars* videogame saga.



STAR WARS: X-WING

RELEASED: 1993

FORMAT: MS-DOS, MAC

Lavished in polygons and set inside a 3D *Star Wars* galaxy, *X-Wing* (set a few months before the events of *A New Hope*) split itself into a trilogy of lengthy campaigns that finally gave insight into a few of the events we weren't made visually privy to in the films. Doing battle from inside the cockpit of X, Y and A-wings, in its rawest form, *X-Wing* is essentially a pretty reboot of the *Star Wars* arcade game, but with plenty more variety in its missions. Also, like the original arcade game, it splits itself into three parts. It begins with your usual dogfighting/reconnaissance tours to set the scene, before tasking you with apprehending and delivering the Death Star plans and it then finishes with the Battle of Yavin. For the first time, players were entrusted the keys to the internal workings of an X-wing cockpit to impart a greater sense of realism. The game also made great use of the iMUSE music system – first used in *Monkey Island 2* – which allowed the in-game music to respond to your actions on screen. It was a hugely successful PC release that went on to garner numerous industry awards and critical acclaim. *X-Wing* would receive two expansion packs, *Imperial Pursuit* (1993) and *B-Wing* (1993) that would chart the Rebel's escape from Yavin and attempt to seek solace inside the mid-constructed Echobase on Hoth, setting the scene for *The Empire Strikes Back* nicely.

THE X-WING SERIES





STAR WARS: TIE FIGHTER

RELEASED: 1994

FORMAT: WINDOWS, MAC

TIE Fighter begins after the Rebel's escape Hoth and it covers the period in the films where Luke is being schooled by Yoda, all the way up to when the first drop of Ewok blood is spilled at the Battle of Endor. The gameplay remains relatively untouched from *X-Wing*, with the main difference being that the game puts you to work for the tyrannical Imperials – a first in a *Star Wars* videogame. This means that throughout the campaign you get to pilot TIE fighters, TIE bombers and TIE interceptors, plus a bunch of made up enemy crafts that didn't appear in the film. A rushed tweaking to the *X-Wing* game engine meant that the visuals would only really benefit from Gouraud shading, enabling the odd dynamic-lighting effect here and there. What made *TIE Fighter* slightly unusual is the sympathetic way in which the Imperials are portrayed in the game. Although it incorporated Rebel-crushing, many of the missions involved policing the skies from treachery and space pirates, dealing with defected Imperials and basically maintaining order in the galaxy. Two subsequent expansion packs, *Enemies Of The Empire* and *Defender Of The Empire* (1994), were later released for the game and would further bolster the appeal and life span of this popular, if atypical, addition to the *Star Wars* franchise.

THE X-WING SERIES



STAR WARS: X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER

RELEASED: 1997

FORMAT: WINDOWS

This risky addition to the *X-Wing* series was completely polarised around multiplayer skirmishes across the internet. Sadly, this meant it sorely lacked any kind of engrossing narrative – an element that its developer, Totally Games, would come to realise was vital to the success of its franchise. As a result the game is often seen as a slight blip on an otherwise immaculate PC series, but if you look past the lagging, the shortcomings of a decent story and accept the game for what it's trying to do – offer fans the chance to shape their own untreated *Star Wars* experiences – hours of online gameplay awaited. Listening to the criticisms, LucasArts would hurry out an expansion pack six months later (*Balance Of Power*), which included a deluge of Rebel and Imperial missions that played out parallel to each other. Although going some lengths to rectify many of the issues that fans bemoaned about the original release, with multiple outcomes to many of the main skirmishes in the game, ultimately, it would come to sit awkwardly within the main *Star Wars* canon.

THE X-WING SERIES

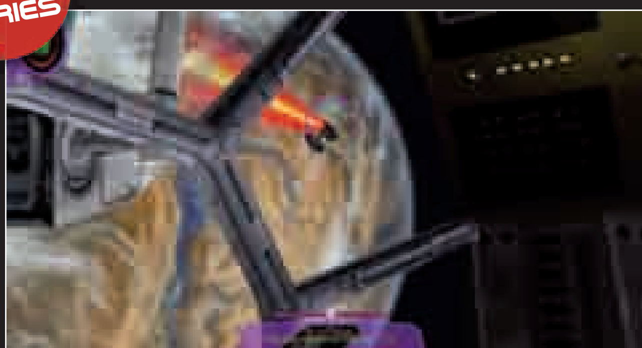


STAR WARS: X-WING ALLIANCE

RELEASED: 1999
FORMAT: WINDOWS

A deep and layered narrative – stretching a plentiful number of space battles – plus a solid multiplayer backend, came bellowing out from this popular *X-Wing* swan song. Working as a space merchant ferrying and protecting cargo from pirates and poachers, the game's everyman hero is swept up inside the interstellar feud between the Rebels and the Empire. *X-Wing Alliance*, set during the events of *The Empire Strikes Back*, concludes alongside *Return Of The Jedi* with you assisting with the obliteration of the second Death Star. Often considered to be the definitive *Star Wars* interstellar combat sim by fans, *X-Wing Alliance* proved that by this time Totally Games had clearly established what elements were working in the series (essentially, an immersive storyline and robust online support) and would get things right first time… considering that it's the only game in the *X-Wing* series to never receive an official update or expansion pack.

THE X-WING SERIES



MASTERS OF TERAS KASI



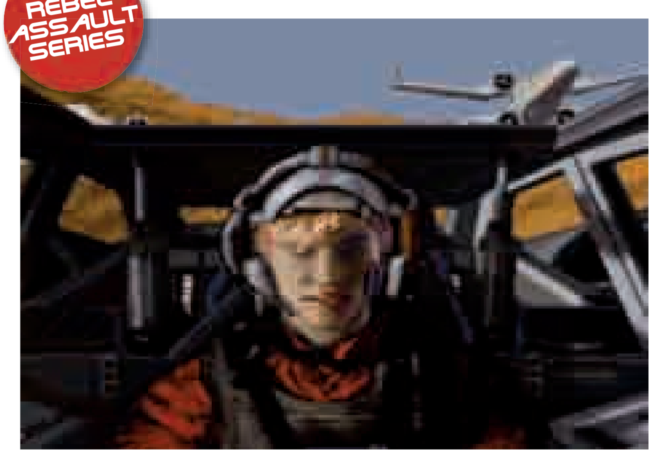
Apparently, *Masters Of Teras Kasi*, which is said to (loosely) translate as 'steel hand' in Finnish (why Finnish?), is set between the events of *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. It seems that after the Battle of Yavin, Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Boba Fett, Princess Leia, Han Solo, Chewbacca and a stormtrooper met up and started kicking seven shades out of each other for reasons unbeknown to us. If the films are anything to go by, it seems that after the fight everyone agreed to sit down and brush the whole deflating incident under the carpet and never speak of it again – for which we should be eternally grateful to them. Playing out like an extremely broken version of *Battle Arena Toshinden* (which should speak absolute volumes), a *Star Wars* beat-'em-up was, in all honesty, a pretty exciting prospect until *Teras Kasi* came along. Marred by poor and sloppy gameplay and a lame knocked-out-in-seven-minutes subplot – some rubbish about a female assassin with a metal arm tasked to kill key members of the resistance by forcing them to fight each other – *Masters Of Teras Kasi* was the metal pallet of iron rods that fell on the camel's back thus killing him. Adding to the problems were cheap and gluttonous attacks that happy to gorged on far too much health bar, plus a roster of crude and unbalanced fighters that lumbered around the screen like they were suffering the recent effects of carbonite encasement.

STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT

RELEASED: 1993
FORMAT: WINDOWS
ALSO ON: MAC, SEGA MEGA-CD, 3DO

The Rebel Assault series was somewhat of an oddity when it was first released back in 1993. It ushered in a glut of on-rails, FMV-style games that would come to find homes on the inaugural wave of CD-based game platforms. The game splits opinion among fans of the series, however, as its cinematic 3D pre-rendered visuals and CD-quality soundtrack hides a very linear *Star Wars* episode. Loosely based on the events of *Episode IV*, oddly *Rebel Assault* doesn't find you playing the role of Skywalker, but instead an illusory character called 'Rookie One' who also happened to be a farm hand on Tatooine. The game's action is essentially moving cross hairs around looping levels of FMV that chart the space battles of the Rebel Alliance. Forming part of Blue Squadron, you essentially play out an alternative version of *A New Hope* that includes a brief Hoth battle scene that oddly smacks of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

REBEL ASSAULT SERIES



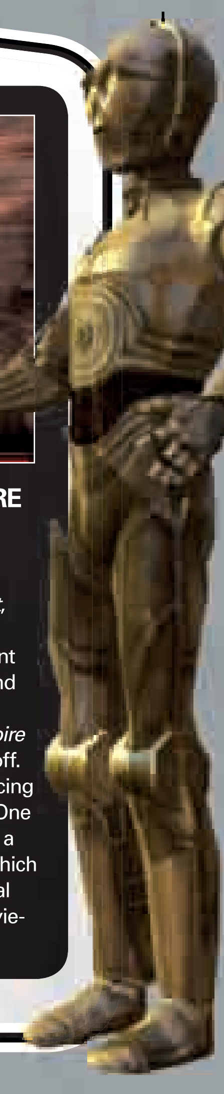
REBEL ASSAULT SERIES



STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT II: THE HIDDEN EMPIRE

RELEASED: 1995
FORMAT: WINDOWS
ALSO ON: MAC, PSONE

More blue-screen gaming ensued with this sequel to *Rebel Assault*, which maintained the original's movie-styled gaming and control issues. The game, however, can be considered a slight improvement over the original. It looks better, the difficulty curve is less jarring and overall it feels like everything has been ramped up a notch or two. Reprising the role of the Rebel cadet 'Rookie One', *The Hidden Empire* story would continue where the previous *Rebel Assault* game left off. After the destruction of the Death Star, strange reports begin surfacing about Rebel forces being set upon by invisible ships. After Rookie One is sent to investigate aboard the Super Star Destroyer, he uncovers a prototype of a Phantom TIE inside (a TIE with a cloaking device), which he steals before blowing up the facility. Sure, they're not exceptional games, and they haven't stood the test of time, but the cheesy movie-style gameplay certainly holds a nostalgic charm.



> "The only issue that we have with Star Wars: Rogue Squadron is its lack of a multiplayer mode"

DARK FORCES SERIES



STAR WARS: DARK FORCES

RELEASED: 1995
FORMAT: MS-DOS
ALSO ON: WINDOWS, MAC, PLAYSTATION

Given that at the time *Doom* and its sequel were fast becoming some of the biggest PC games of all time, the thinking of lumping pseudo-3D demon-slaying gameplay with the *Star Wars* franchise was clearly a no-brainer for LucasArts. As you might expect, the fruits of this hybrid harvest would prove to be immensely successful. Blasting away fuzzy-looking stormtroopers feels somewhat laughable today, but at the time the tone and tension that *Dark Forces* emitted was staggering. Whereas *Doom* filled its boots with 'find key card to open lock' puzzles that stretched dark and claustrophobic corridors of hellish blood-letting, *Dark Forces* would dazzle with far greater immersion, an emphasis on puzzle solving and varied level design. It was the first game to be set inside the *Star Wars* 'expanded universe', sat aloft a mountainous pile of books, comics and thematic spin-offs that dubiously fleshed out the *Star Wars* universe for its fan base after the credits rolled on *Return Of The Jedi*. The story, sitting somewhere between *Episode IV* and *V*, tells the story of the 'Dark Troopers' project: a super strain of black stormtroopers who threaten the Rebel campaign. You play Kyle Katarn, a shadowy mercenary employed by the Rebels to try to validate whether the project exists, who then has the task of pulling the plug on the operation before it's too late.

STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II

RELEASED: 1997
FORMAT: WINDOWS

If Dark Forces could be seen to draw influences from *Doom*, for the sequel LucasArts would clearly select *Quake* to play its muse. Set after the events of *Episode IV*, *Dark Forces II* would again choose to centre on the mercenary Kyle Katarn. Kyle has since learned that he is a Jedi and has agreed to help the Rebels pro bono. Of course, being a Jedi now means Kyle gains access to 'the Force' and more importantly a Lightsaber. The synopsis also echoes a familiar father/son story; with Kyle racing to train in the ways of the Jedi so he can seek a Sith Lord who he believes was responsible for the death of his father. The game is also the first to introduce two-tiered (dark or light) Force powers, influenced by a novel point system that awarded you 'dark points' for merciless Anakin-style butchering and 'light points' for helping defenceless old droids cross the road. *Dark Forces II* also came packed with an online multiplayer mode and became the first *Star Wars* game to allow proper Lightsaber duels online. An expansion pack, *Star Wars Jedi Knight: Mysteries Of The Sith* (1998), soon followed and saw the main protagonist switch from Kyle to his female apprentice Jan Ors. The add-on included more multiplayer modes, removed the whole Force power element, and played to a familiar, but flipped, Anakin/Obi-Wan tune, with Kyle falling into the hands of the Empire and Jan vowing to find her disillusioned master and wheedle him back to rectitude.

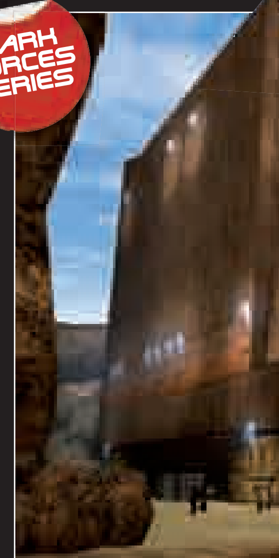
DARK FORCES SERIES



STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

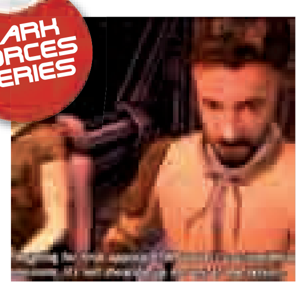
RELEASED: 2003
FORMAT: WINDOWS
ALSO ON: XBOX, MAC

DARK FORCES SERIES



By the time the final instalment of the *Dark Forces* series was nearing completion, the Quake III engine was beginning to look a little long in the tooth. Nevertheless, Raven Software would serve up another solid instalment to a popular *Star Wars* series. Sadly, Kyle has once again been ousted and in his place stands another of his unpolished Jedi apprentices. The removal of Kyle (which was to allow Raven to wipe the Force-levels clean and sustain a smooth progression of difficulty) means that we too must start afresh, taking part in a new chapter that tries to offer more freedom, but at a cost. For the first time, players could customise their Jedi and choose the hilt, colour and style of his/her Lightsaber. To its benefit, straight off the bat you get to wield both the Lightsaber and 'the Force' (the latter of which you could now level up between missions). But what good *Jedi Academy* added, through more options and solid gameplay, is sadly squandered by the game's narrative. There's no real sense of an epic story being told here, essential for any *Star Wars* game worth its salt.

DARK FORCES SERIES



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

RELEASED: 2002
FORMAT: WINDOWS
ALSO ON: XBOX, PS2, MAC, GC

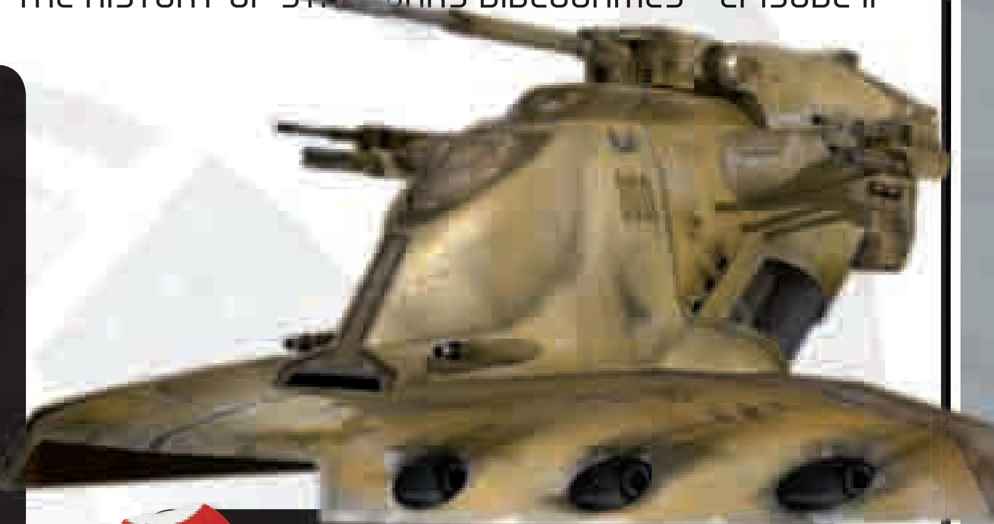
In a twist of development irony, *Jedi Outcast* would chug from the Quake III: Team Arena engine. After the events of *Mysteries Of The Sith*, Kyle had lost confidence in himself and his loyalty to the Rebels. As a result, he has entrusted his Lightsaber to the wistful Luke Skywalker, who we find is leading his own Jedi school on Yavin IV. However, a defected scholar and the apparent death of Jan Ors force Kyle back into battle. For *Jedi Knight II* the general gameplay would remain, but Force powers would find themselves split into more tangible powers, including 'push', 'mind-trick' and 'lightning'. The game would also pander to multiplayer crowds by allowing Jedi wannabes to do battle across the internet.

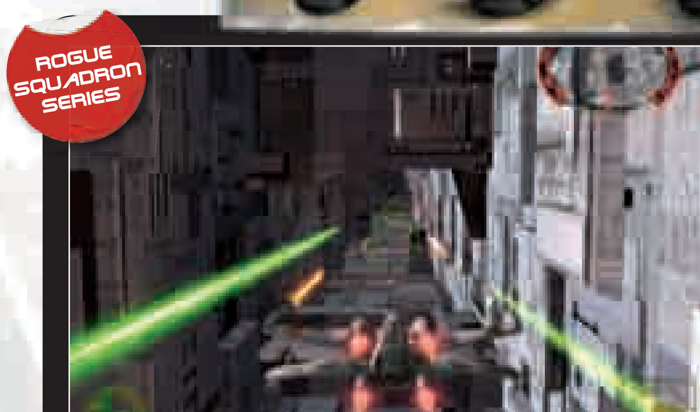


STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON

RELEASED: 1998
FORMAT: N64, PC (AS STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON 3D)

Rogue Squadron was originally intended to be a game that would cherry-pick space battles from the first trilogy. Taking its lead from *Shadows Of The Empire*, *Rogue Squadron* would share similar controls and combat, but would set the action over the various surfaces of the *Star Wars* universe rather than keeping it solely in space. The game plonks you back into the comfy jumpsuit of Luke Skywalker as he and Wedge Antilles lead a series of rescue, destroy, recon and protect missions across some impressively vast vistas from the *Star Wars* films. As well as seriously ramping up the visuals, where *Rogue Squadron* really excels are the fulsome and varied missions, the impressive roster of crafts and the exhilarating sensation that came from leading a squad of semi-intelligent NPCs into a space battle. In fact, the only issue we have with it is its lack of a multiplayer mode, shortening the life span of the game dramatically.

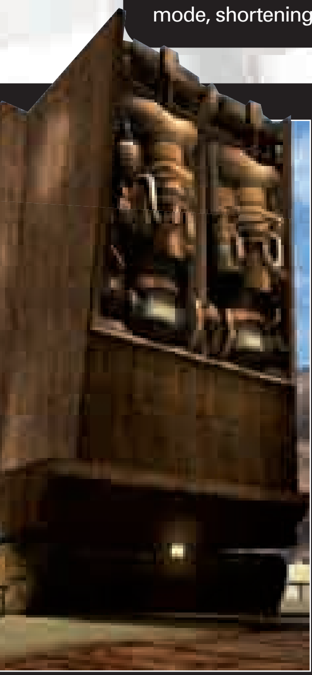




STAR WARS: ROGUE LEADER: ROGUE SQUADRON II

RELEASED: 2001
FORMAT: GAMECUBE

The Star Wars franchise is no stranger to a retread, and as such you're probably getting as bored of reading 'such and such let you relive the climatic Death Star trench battle' as we are of writing it. But here we are again reliving those classic moments from the films that Atari was first vectoring 18 years prior to this GameCube launch title. Owing to the Cube's extra muscle, the missions now find themselves in glorious outer space, and the graphics benefit from a massive overhaul – cleansing the screen of all that Nintendo 64 fog that cluttered up the skies in the last game and instead plying it with a silly amount of ships. The game was one of the most successful and popular release titles for the GameCube and is considered by some to be one of the best looking and most accurate *Star Wars* games ever released – if you need numbers, the Star Destroyers in the game are reputedly constructed of 300,000 polygons!





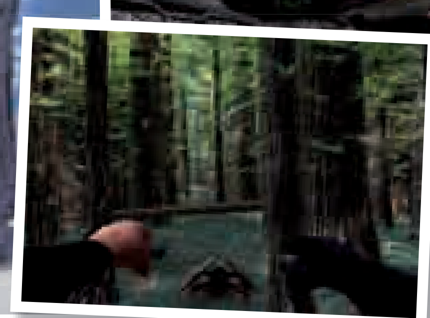
STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

RELEASED: 2003
FORMAT: GAMECUBE

Ever heard of the expression 'if it ain't broken, leave it how the hell you found it?' Well, this statement really does apply with *Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike*. Blatantly feeling the pressure to tweak the game in some way, Factor 5 opted to permeate its fantastic aerial dogfighting engines with laughable on-foot sections that go some length to making *Grand Theft Auto*'s combat system look truly inspired. As a result, you get a game of two distinct halves: more of that great aerial combat, but with some vehicular stages thrown in for variety and these tepid and unrefined on-foot sections. Essentially, it's *Shadows Of The Empire* meets *Rogue Squadron*, and it's certainly not a perfect cocktail. However, it comes with a co-op and multiplayer mode, plus a ménage à trois of Easter eggs in the shape of Atari's original *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi* arcade games.







"Compared to the fugly videogame tie-in, the Phantom Menace movie is something of a spectacular wonder"

STAR WARS: EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE

RELEASED: 1999
FORMAT: PSONE, PC

Even though The *Phantom Menace* movie faced a stiff lambasting for failing to recapture the whimsical feel of the first three films – due to the decision to try to quantify the Force with midi-chlorians (Jedi-germs) and every scene with that camel-faced Jar Jar Binks in it – when compared to the fugly videogame tie-in, the movie is something of a spectacular wonder. The problem in *The Phantom Menace* lies with its terrible graphics, which allow you to move blocky sprites of the film's main players, Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon Jinn, around what is essentially a headache-inducing third-person run-'n'-gun maze game that lets you control in-game conversations. The game also seemed to have difficulty following the events of the film, simply doing its own thing and adding peculiar events that didn't actually appear in the movie – the most infamous among fans being the level where Qui-Gon seeks out to find Jabba the Hutt. And while this might sound like you're getting slightly more bang for your buck here, with a game that's this lame the last thing you want to occur is some unnecessary milking… especially when the milk looks like it's been extracted from the hairy and crusty nips of a dead Wookiee.





STAR WARS: JEDI POWER BATTLES

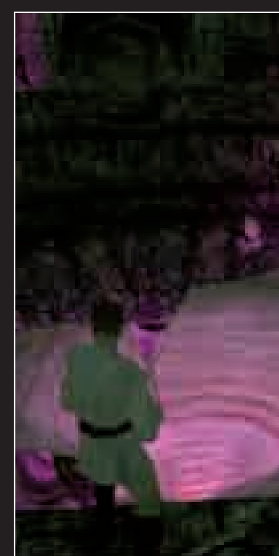
RELEASED: 2000
FORMAT: DC, PSONE, GBA

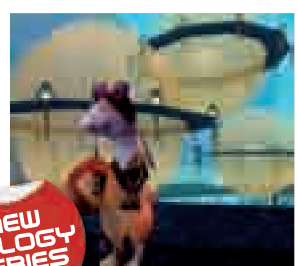
To say Star *Wars: Jedi Power Battles* is one of the better home console games to come out of *The Phantom Menace* is kind of like saying that being forced to watch an episode of *Sex And The City* is better than pulling your eyes out with a spoon. Placing you in the roles of various Jedis, including Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Plo Koon and Samuel L Jackson's Mace, the game can best be described as a simple, hair-brained hack-'n'-smash arcade game that benefits from having a neat targeting system and some pretty snazzy visuals (in fact, we would probably even go as far as to say that some of the best-looking games we've seen pumped out of the PSone). *Jedi Power Battles* is not without its faults, however, as a maddening fixed camera makes the game's twitchy platform sections quite laborious at times, but for the most part the game's ten stages do hold momentary pockets of enjoyment, especially if you're playing it with a mate, a family member or an especially good-looking stranger that you happened across in a bar.

STAR WARS: OBI-WAN

RELEASED: 2001
FORMAT: XBOX

Bestowed with one of the ugliest-looking *Star Wars* box arts ever (what can only be described as an out-of-focus snap of Ewan McGregor with gamma poisoning), this once-PC-turned-Xbox exclusive takes Obi-Wan and fleshes out his past over a handful of repetitive levels that predate and eventually reunite with the events of the film. Such new additions include Obi's encounter with a criminal organisation called the Black Hoth and his infiltration of a Tusken Raider hideout. The game also cheapens his Jedi training by implying that it simply involved him occasionally sparring with other Jedis in a room. The result is a game that feels a little all over the place, not helped by its unkempt visual style and some monotonous gameplay. The jewel in its crown was its innovative and intuitive Lightsaber controls that allowed you to satisfyingly wield your weapon using the right analogue nub (had the game been released on PC the Lighsaber combat was due to be controlled by the mouse). Parrying laser blasts and slicing droids with organic combos added some light relief to an otherwise bland and limited game.





STAR WARS: SUPER BOMBAD RACING

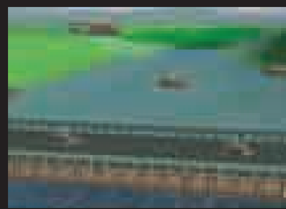
RELEASED: 2001
FORMAT: PS2, WINDOWS, DC

Given the childish handling of *The Phantom Menace*, it was inevitable that LucasArts would eventually steer the series into the kiddie racer genre. Close in feel to *Diddy Kong Racing*, *Super Bombad Racing* pits familiar *Star Wars* faces into one of those 'kart racers' that never seem to have any karts in them.

What is slightly peculiar about *Bombad* is that it features characters from both trilogies, so you get to see Anakin, Darth Maul and Obi-Wan racing Darth Vader, Boba Fett and Yoda. Thankfully, *Bombad* isn't the shameful pap that it deserves to be. There's a few issues – the controls can take a while to master and the characters are unbalanced, but the game is blessed with a few impressively vast racetracks.

NEW TRILOGY SERIES





STAR WARS: BATTLE FOR NABOO

RELEASED: 2000

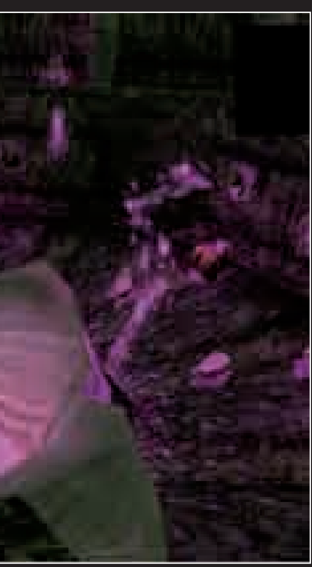
FORMAT: PC, N64

Battle For Naboo is essentially a grounded version of *Rogue Squadron* (although there are aerial vehicles in the game). It charts the story of Lt Gavin Sykes, a resolute resistance pilot who, after being forced out of his home following an invasion by the Trade Federation on his home of Naboo, works to overthrow them in a series of 15 search and destroy, sabotage, recon and escort missions. Like the film, the game eventually culminates in a final push to try to break the Federation's grip over the capital Theed. Great mission variety, and a plentiful amount of crafts are spoiled by gradually repetitive gameplay that really begins to wear you down towards the end. A game for *Rogue Squadron* fans looking for something a little different.

SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE

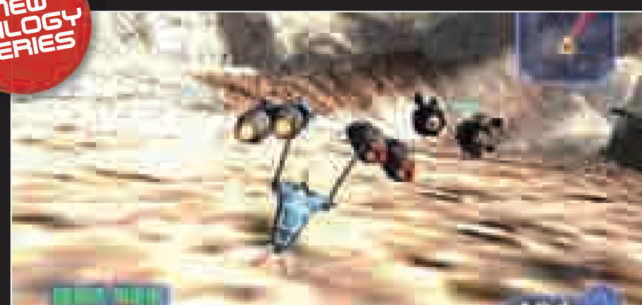


Continuing the LucasArts affinity with Nintendo, both companies would commemorate the launch of the N64 with the most daring *Star Wars* game to date. *Shadows Of The Empire* chronicled the Rebellion campaign between the period of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*, and would effectively shoehorn an entirely new videogame episode into the movies – hence its cinematic-sounding title. Planting the player into the role of the bounty hunter Dash Rendar, your mission began with you entering the Echobase on Hoth as the rebels make their escape. The game is similar in style to *Dark Forces*, but fuses the occasional race and space battle into the mix. It also charts Dash's clash with Boba Fett as he tries to rescue Han Solo and retrieve Princess Leia, who's been captured by a villain called Prince Xizor. Behind those unmistakable N64 visuals – foggy worlds full of crude-looking angular characters – is an enjoyable game marred by camera issues and clumsy controls.





NEW TRILOGY SERIES



STAR WARS RACER REVENGE

RELEASED: 2002

FORMAT: PS2

The races in *Star Wars Racer Revenge* were as much about trading blows as they were about jostling for position. This time crashing your pod ends the race, and there's a subtle element of strategy introduced into the racing that comes from the in-race damage repair. Deftly repairing your craft – which you can do by holding the L2 button – will cause it to heal but at the cost of it losing power (essentially adding pitting to the races). This meant you had to consider wisely the moments you chose to repair as you weighed up the risk of regaining position over whether or not you were likely to see the next corner. Overall, *Racer Revenge* is a short but ultimately satisfying little racer.

STAR WARS: EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH

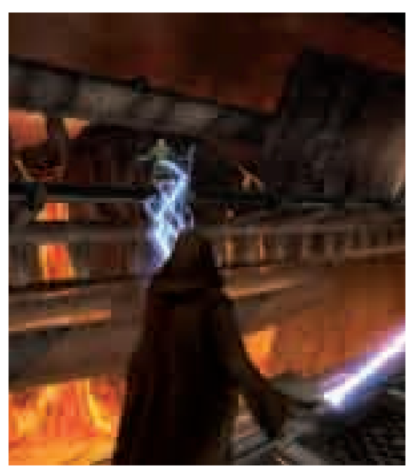
RELEASED: 2005

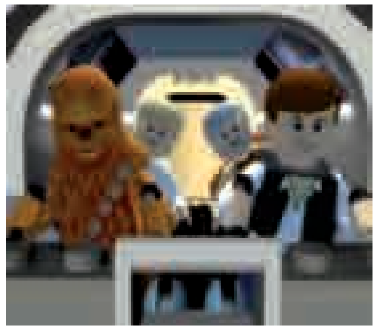
FORMAT: PS2, XBOX, DS, GBA, PSP

Essentially taking its lead from EA's *Lord Of The Rings* games, *Revenge Of The Sith* is basically a third-person scrolling hack-'n'-slash game that places you inside the Jedi boots of either Obi-Wan Kenobi or Anakin Skywalker. Boasting your usual Lightsaber laser parry and Force powers, the game's real selling point is that it has some additional scenes that you wouldn't have been able to see in the movie, and it even features an unlockable alternative ending (which we won't spoil for you). While doing nothing that we haven't seen done a billion times before… and better, *Revenge Of The Sith* does offer plenty of fan service.

NEW TRILOGY SERIES









LEGO STAR WARS SERIES

MADE UP OF: LEGO STAR WARS (2005) / LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY (2006) / LEGO STAR WARS: THE COMPLETE SAGA (2007) (ALL VARIOUS FORMATS)

When you've totally exhausted all avenues with a franchise, sucked it dry of every conceivable way you could try to turn, shoehorned or adapted it to a videogame, there's apparently one last port of call: Lego. With *Indiana Jones* recently getting a good Danish blocking, and *Batman* waiting in the wings, it was *Star Wars* that would pioneer this peculiar gaming phenomenon. Cramming the game with over 50 playable characters (100 or so in the sequel), and adopting a unique and humorous take on Force powers, where you could destruct and manipulate individual Lego bricks. The series kicked off chronologically with *Episodes I* to *III* released first and *IV* to *VI* the following year. Both games have since been compiled into *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga*. Its kiddie-centric nature, lack of any real challenge and frustrating trial-and-error gameplay meant it was a little rough around the edges (and *Indy* doesn't make any effort to rectify these issues), but bags of irreverence and humour simply make these must-play games for any *Star Wars* fan.



STARFIGHTER SERIES

MADE UP OF: STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER (WINDOWS, PS2; 2001) / STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER SPECIAL EDITION (XBOX; 2001) / STAR WARS: JEDI STARFIGHTER (XBOX, PS2; 2002)

The Starfighter games are essentially PS2 and Xbox takes on *Rogue Squadron*. The bottom line is *Star Wars: Starfighter Special Edition* should have been the version LucasArts rolled out in the first place. It's frustrating for PS2 owners, but the Xbox's special edition features more multiplayer modes and some customary tweaks to the visuals. Sitting somewhere between *X-Wing*'s sense of realism and the arcade feel of *Rogue Squadron*, the game played out through the eyes of three central characters and charted the Battle of Naboo from inside various ships associated with each pilot. In typical *Star Wars* fashion, for the sequel, *Jedi Starfighter*, LucasArts would introduce ground vehicles to the mix, making use of 'Force powers' through the ship's weapons and a co-op mode

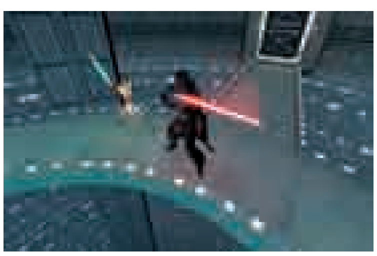
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC SERIES

MADE UP OF: STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC (WINDOWS, XBOX, MAC; 2003) / STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS (WINDOWS, XBOX; 2005)

Fleshing out the *Star Wars* extended universe like no game had done before, RPG stalwarts BioWare would adapt the meticulous attention to detail and epic narrative of PC games *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights* into the *Star Wars* world. *Knights Of The Old Republic* was a sprawling role-playing game that used a combat system more commonly seen in collectable card games (which Darran can happily chew your ear over for several hours a day). It also actively jotted down your speech and actions, so if you acted dishonourably your appearance would evolve accordingly. For the sequel, *The Sith Lords*, development duties would be handed over to Obsidian Entertainment at the bequest of BioWare and, set a few years after the original, would simply offer more of the same immersive *Star Wars* gameplay.







GALAXIES SERIES

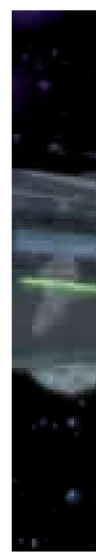
MADE UP OF: STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED (WINDOWS; 2003) / STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED (WINDOWS; 2004) / STAR WARS GALAXIES: EPISODE III: RAGE OF THE WOOKIEES (WINDOWS; 2005) / STAR WARS GALAXIES: THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE (WINDOWS; 2005) / STAR WARS GALAXIES: TRIALS OF OBI-WAN (WINDOWS; 2005) / STAR WARS GALAXIES: STARTER KIT (WINDOWS; 2005) / STAR WARS GALAXIES: THE COMPLETE ONLINE ADVENTURE (WINDOWS; 2006)

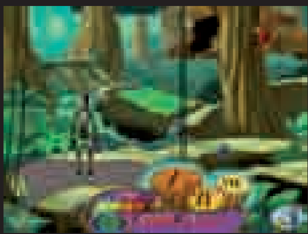
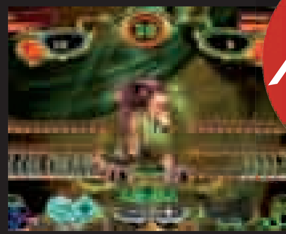
MMORPG series from the makers of *EverQuest* set inside the *Star Wars* universe that was predominantly a ground-based RPG. The first expansion pack, the idiotically titled *Jump To Lightspeed*, would jettison the game into the far reaches of space and the third, *Rage Of The Wookiees*, would capture the release of *Revenge Of The Sith* by adding it into the narrative of the new trilogy. Numerous other expansion packs would work to flesh out the universe and provide a comprehensive and realistic *Star Wars* world for PC owners to potentially while away a few light years with.

BATTLEFRONT SERIES

MADE UP OF: STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT (PS2, WINDOWS, XBOX, MAC; 2004) / STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II (PS2, WINDOWS, XBOX, PSP; 2005) / STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT: RENEGADE SQUADRON (PSP; 2007)

Pandemic's Star Wars take on the *Battlefield* franchise is one that suits the epic feel of the series well. Giving you the opportunity to engage in some of the most historic battles in the *Star Wars* universe from the frontline, the game is an absolute beast brimming with excitement and variation. A smorgasbord of ships and *Star Wars* vehicles littered its vast battlefields, and despite some dubious and repetitive-feeling level designs the game on the whole is pretty good. However, it does suffer from the same issues that plagued the *X-Wing Vs. TIE Fighter* game, in that it's essentially polarised around multiplayer gaming, so the single-player experience is a little flat. The sequel simply upped the ante, and as a result is a far better game, feeling a lot more refined and taking the battlefields into space.

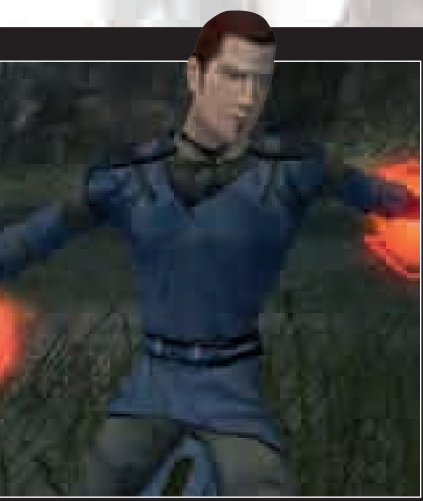
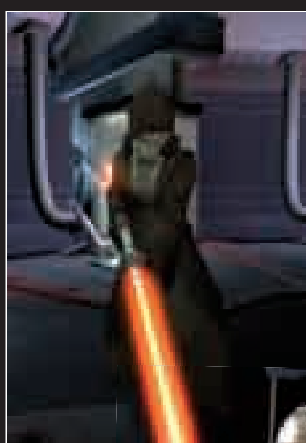
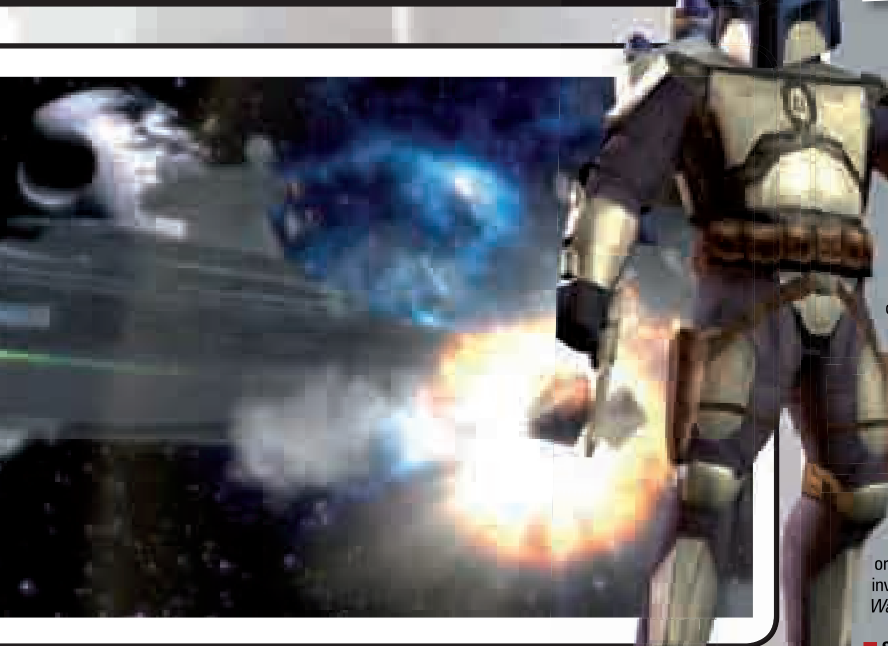


LUCAS LEARNING SERIES

MADE UP OF: STAR WARS: YODA'S CHALLENGE (WINDOWS; 1999) / STAR WARS: GUNGAN FRONTIER (WINDOWS; 1999) / STAR WARS: DROID WORKS (WINDOWS, MAC; 1998) / STAR WARS: PIT DROIDS (WINDOWS, MAC; 1999) / STAR WARS MATHS: JABBA'S GAME GALAXY (WINDOWS; 2000) / STAR WARS: JAR JAR'S JOURNEY ADVENTURE BOOK (WINDOWS, MAC; 1999)

LucasArts would release a number of educational titles that leaned on the *Star Wars* universe. We haven't played any of the games so it would be unfair and childish for us to poke fun at them, though they do sound quite novel. With tasks varying from building droids to constructing your own podrace, as far as learning games go, and given that *Bombad Racing* wasn't a total waste of a kart game based on the characters from *Star Wars*, the Lucas Learning Series is probably not all that bad.

AND THE REST…

■ Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds (Windows, Mac; 2001) [EP] Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds: Clone Campaigns (Windows, Mac; 2002)
A genre rarity this one: a science-fiction strategy game on the PC. Set predominately around the Clone Wars, a solid and deep strategy game.

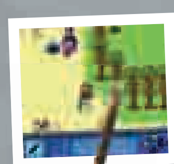
■ Star Wars: Episode II: The New Droid Army (GBA; 2002)
Similar in look and feel to the GBA version of *Jedi Power Battles, The New Droid Army* is an isometric hack-and-slash game set around the events of *Episode II.* Playing Anakin Skywalker you must repel the Droid Army. Nothing special, just lots of annoying standing around.



■ Star Wars: Episode II: Attack Of The Clones (GBA; 2002)
This GBA re-enactment of *Episode II* is essentially a duff take on *Super Star Wars.* It's duff because it's repetitive, it's duff because your character almost fills the entire screen, and it's duff because you can't attack without moving.

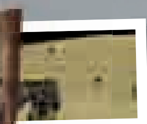
■ Star Wars Chess (Mega-CD, Windows; 1993)
Neat little game of chess. The gameplay is like chess; so we won't waste time explaining the rules. If you like chess and you like *Star Wars*, you'll like *Star Wars Chess.* Developed by Mindscape, the best thing about the game is the humorous animated cut-scene that flashes up when you make your move.

■ Monopoly Star Wars Edition (Windows; 1997)
Play as an old boot, a terrier, an iron and Luke Skywalker's hand. Instead of Mayfair you can invest in the Death Star, and Old Kent Road becomes that dusty sandy squalor that Tuskan Raider rents out to his mum.



■ Star Wars: Yoda Stories (Windows; 1997)
A peculiar PC desktop game in the mould of minesweeper and solitaire. *Yoda Stories* is as irreverent a *Star Wars* game as you're likely to find. Kind of loosely set around Skywalker's Jedi training, the game has you helping a fat-headed Luke running an errand for Miss Piggy. Fun but ultimately limited.

■ Star Wars: Rebellion (Windows; 1998)
Star Wars goes *Champ Man* in this rich yet insanely difficult and convoluted multiple window-opening strategy game. It's a struggle to master the controls, work out what the hell you're actually supposed to be doing and essentially not lose yourself in a sea of interface windows. The only redeeming feature is that you can actually build a Deathstar.

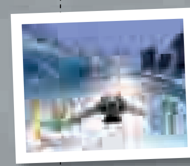


■ Star Wars: Demolition (PSone, DC; 2000)
With podraces outlawed, the gambling addict Jabba the Hutt has come up with the idea of organising an underground (not literally) tournament involving vehicular destruction. Essentially *Star Wars* does *Twisted Metal*, but nowhere near as well.

■ Star Wars: Force Commander (Windows; 2000)
Touted as the pinnacle *Star Wars* strategy game, with ropey visuals (although much nicer than *Rebellion*), *Force Commander* is another rich desktop RTS game that will probably only hold appeal with the die-hards.

■ Star Wars: Bounty Hunter (PS2, GC; 2002)
Playing the role of Jango Fett (Boba's dadda) this game is essentially a videogame spin-off series. It's a competent enough third-cum-first-person action adventure though, but the type we've seen done better countless times before. It charts some pretty important events in the *Star Wars* universe, most notably Jango acquiring the Slave I and his Aussie love juice being used to create The Clone Army.

■ Star Wars: The Clone Wars (PS2, GC, Xbox; 2002)
Grossly underrated *Star Wars* combat sim, *The Clone Wars* looks brilliant, has plenty of action – it never loses steam – and is easily one of the best *Star Wars* tie-in games of the new trilogy to find a release. Shame it's just so damn short.



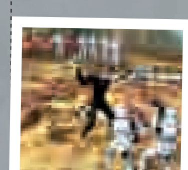
■ Star Wars: Flight Of The Falcon (GBA; 2003)
The fact you can't play this game without having to immediately undergo corrective eye surgery is certainly an issue. This ugly, garish portable mess is essentially the abysmal Mode 7 Millennium Falcon mode finale of *Super Return Of The Jedi*, but stretched out into an entire game. Truly awful.

■ Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice Of The Force (GBA; 2004)
The *Super Star Wars* trilogy meets *Batman: The Animated Series.* With odd visuals and interesting premise, essentially the game runs you through the events of *Episode IV* to *VI*, elaborating on certain scenes on the way, and providing an enjoyable little complete *Star Wars* caper for the Game Boy Advance.



■ Star Wars: Republic Commando (Windows, Xbox; 2005)
A neat little squad-based action game that plonks you in charge of a squad of clone troopers. Set around three campaigns that build up to *The Revenge Of The Sith.* It's atypical and isn't drenched in *Star Wars*-isms, and that really is its charm. The game looks fantastic, though you could argue that the locations could conceivably be the setting of any other futuristic action game.

■ Star Wars: Lethal Alliance (DS, PSP; 2006)
An uninspiring third-person action game that sits between the new and old trilogy. The game has you play the role of mercenary and *Star Wars* newcomer Rianna Saren. Essentially you're on a quest to locate another set of Death Star plans (lame), and have to endure repetitive gameplay and fiddly PSP controls to complete your mission.

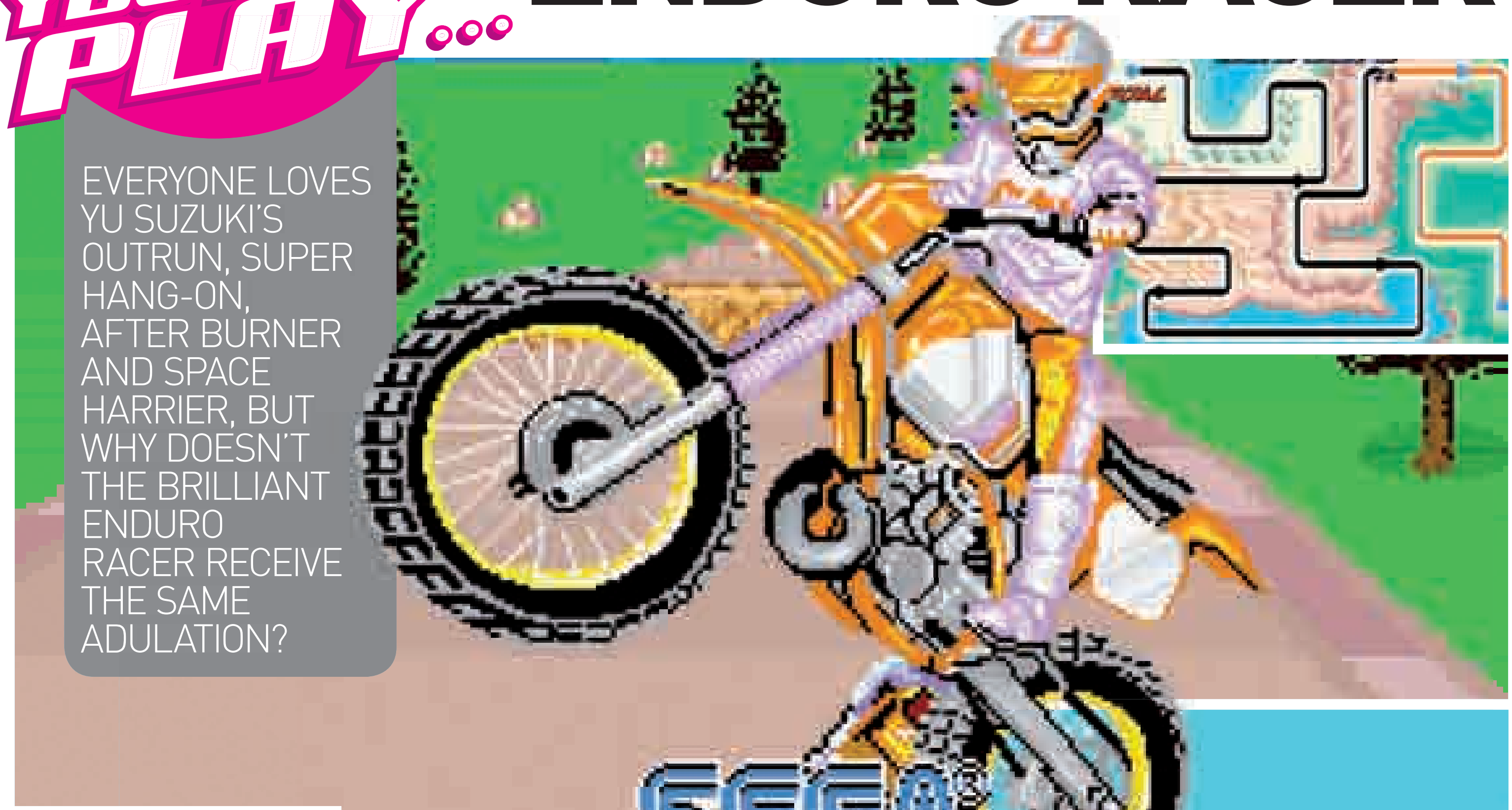


■ Star Wars: Empire At War (Windows, Mac; 2006) [EP] Star Wars: Empire At War: Forces Of Corruption (Windows; 2006)
This is more like it. A strategy game from Petroglyph – a development troupe made up of ex-Westwood employees. Yep, we're sold from the off, and rightly so. This is the game *Star Wars* strategists were waiting for. And while it's by no means inspiring, and it's not doing anything brilliant in the RTS genre, it dumps all over *Rebellion* and then wipes its batty with *Force Commander.*

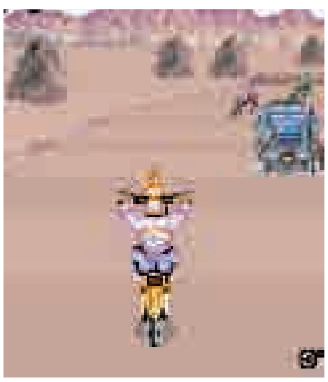
■ Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, DS, PS2; 2008)
Using the same Euphoria physics engine previously seen in *Grand Theft Auto IV, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* is essentially *TIE Fighter* meets *Dark Forces.* It allows you to play a third/first-person action-adventure game where you play an apprentice of Darth Vader who sounds a bit like a GoBot.

WHY YOU MUST PLAY…

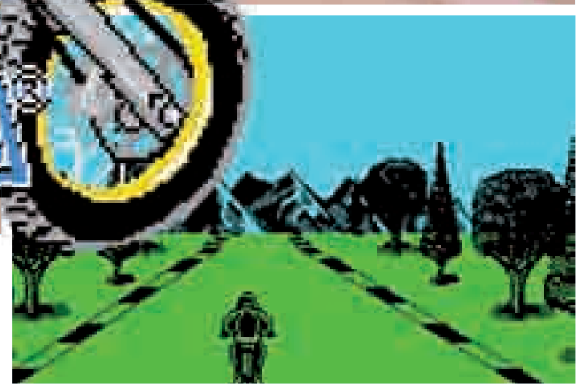
ENDURO RACER



EVERYONE LOVES YU SUZUKI'S OUTRUN, SUPER HANG-ON, AFTER BURNER AND SPACE HARRIER, BUT WHY DOESN'T THE BRILLIANT ENDURO RACER RECEIVE THE SAME ADULATION?



» If you're not going to complete a stage then you might as well go out in style…



» Special thanks to Daniel Coulom for supplying us with this screenshot from the Thomson MO5 version of *Enduro Racer*. You can view more images at http://dcmoto.free.fr.

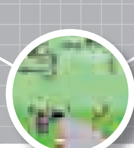
Although Yu Suzuki's *Enduro Racer* isn't a direct sequel to his 1985 hit *Hang-On*, it's easy to see how many people would draw a connection between the two racers. Both arcade machines allowed you to sit on the back of a replica bike (or simply use a pair of authentic-looking handlebars on the smaller, stand-up versions), both boasted vibrant chunky sprites that belted along at an insane pace and they each had you racing against an increasingly tight time limit.

That's where the similarities end though, for *Enduro Racer* not only pits you against other riders and that aforementioned ticking clock, but also requires you to navigate some of the toughest terrain (for the time at least) to ever grace a racing game.

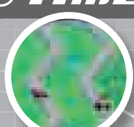
Utilising the same hardware as *Space Harrier* (and *Hang-On* for that matter), Yu Suzuki upped the ante by having the action take place on a far more exciting track, that made the track of *Hang-On* as exciting as a Sunday afternoon walk through Bournemouth gardens. As with *OutRun*, which was also released in 1986, the course you sped along was no longer flat and lifeless; but was instead an undulating, almost organic creation that dipped and bobbed like a living entity. The excitement of speeding along this constantly changing track was further enhanced by the occasional presence of deadly patches of rock and huge dirt mounds that would fill the entire track from side to side.

Hit these ramps correctly – by forcefully pulling back on the handlebars before you made impact – and your rider would soar

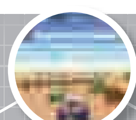
TIMELINE



UP 'N DOWN
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1983



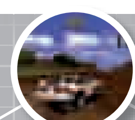
BUGGY BOY
Version Featured: C64
Year Released: 1987



BIG RUN
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1990



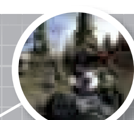
MOTO FRENZY
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1992



SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
Version Featured: Saturn
Year Released: 1995

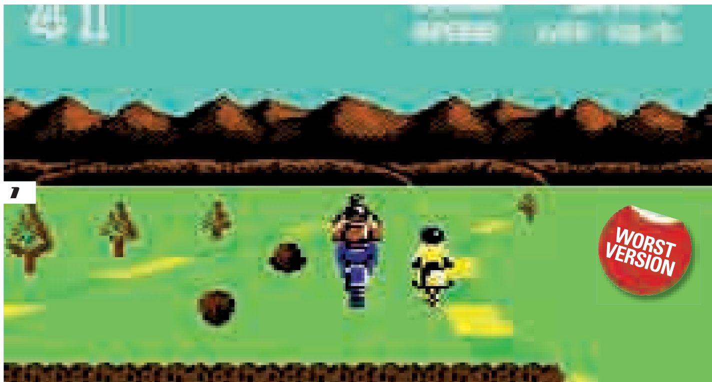


COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3
Version Featured: PC
Year Released: 2003

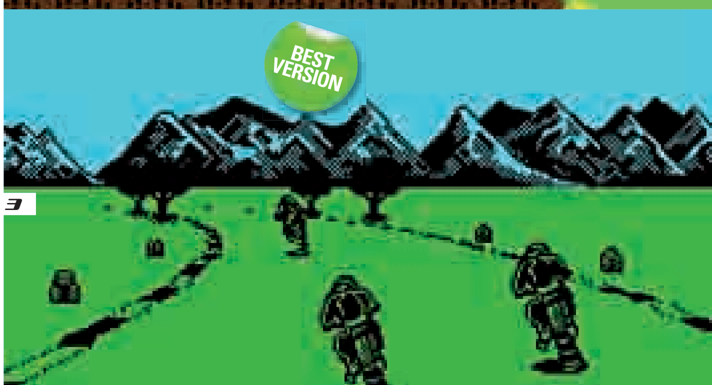


MX VS ATV UNTAMED
Version Featured: Xbox 360
Year Released: 2008

THE CONVERSIONS









1. COMMODORE 64
Oh dear, this is one sorry effort. We were never expecting the home machines to capture the thrills and spills of the original, but we weren't expecting this trash either. With its sluggish controls, lack of speed and questionable collision detection, this is the worst conversion of *Enduro Racer.* The fact that the sprites look as if they've been created by a three-year-old child and a set of Lego blocks doesn't help. Stay well away, or simply close your eyes and imagine you're playing the original.

2. AMSTRAD CPC
We're never fans of direct Speccy ports, so we were instantly put off by this lacklustre Amstrad conversion, as it smacks of laziness. While it looks better than the horrendous C64 effort, it still suffers from a lack of speed, dodgy controls and dull as ditchwater gameplay. Kudos for making the sprites look like actual dirt bikes – and not mopeds like in the C64 outing – but this is another example of an 8-bit system being unable to match the arcade parent it was based on. What a pity.

3. ZX SPECTRUM
This is more like it. The ZX Spectrum effort is far from brilliant – it's still too slow for our liking – but there's no denying that it's the most authentic version of the 8-bit bunch and we've lost a hell of a lot of time on it since writing this article. Scrolling is smooth and slick; the big bold sprites look great and perfectly capture the styling and feel of the originals, while the dubious collision detection that was so rampant on the Amstrad and C64 efforts is nowhere to be seen. The Spectrum gets an easy win.

4. MASTER SYSTEM
This is just plain bizarre. There's no denying that Sega's version of *Enduro Racer* is miles ahead of the competition in terms of visuals and gameplay, but why does it look like *Paperboy*? Stupidly easy to play, there's rarely more than a buggy on screen at any one time, *Enduro Racer* may be a competent variation on *Excitebike*, but it has little in common with the original game. If you were hoping to find a console version of the arcade original then you're going to be very disappointed.

majestically through the air; easily bypassing the dangerous hazards on the other side. Get your timing wrong, however, and the unlucky fellow would get flung from his seat and end up among those deadly rocks found on the other side. Even these poorly timed leaps weren't without merit however, as it made for some tense moments as you desperately tried to weave your way through the ever-complicated rock formations.

Indeed, these potentially deadly encounters actually highlighted *Enduro Racer*'s greatest strengths, for few other racers (especially those on two wheels) were able to match the exhilaration that Yu Suzuki's off-road racer was able to offer. After all, here was a game that not only constantly pushed you, but also required you to have upper-arm strength that would put an arm wrestler to shame (constantly pulling back on those handlebars took a lot out of you).

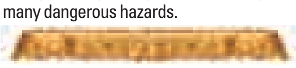
While it certainly had its issues – good luck completing later stages if you've already crashed, or finding a machine that didn't suffer from buggered-up handlebars – there was something immensely satisfying about tackling those deviously designed courses that only Leftfield's excellent *Excitebike 64* has ever been able to successfully recreate.

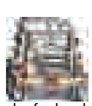
Unsurprisingly, various 8-bit systems ended up with their own conversions, courtesy of Activision, but none came close to matching the excitement of the original – although many Spectrum owners will (rightly) argue that theirs was definitely the best of a distinctly average lot.

We've never really understood why *Enduro Racer* never gets mentioned as often as the likes of *OutRun* and *Space Harrier,* because it's easily on a par with those other Yu Suzuki hits. All we can hope is that this article will persuade you to track a copy of the game down for yourself, or visit a lonely, windswept arcade in the hope that one's still surviving in the world.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

DIRT RAMPS
Hit one of these bad boys just right and you'll soar gracefully through the air, missing out many dangerous hazards.





CARS
You don't start seeing these until the second stage. Larger than rival bikes, they prove to be far harder to pass and can easily send you sprawling.



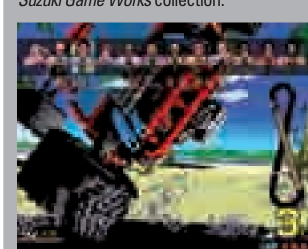
ROCKS
Hitting these will put you in a whole world of hurt so just don't do it, okay? Later levels see these immovable objects getting larger and larger.



BIKER
Although you'll be on the starting line with four other bikers, that doesn't mean you won't constantly pass more of them as the race continues.

TRY THIS NEXT

POWER DRIFT
Want more Sega thrills and spills? Then hunt down the excellent *Power Drift,* which was also by Yu Suzuki. The undulating tracks of *Enduro Racer* have been replaced by elevated courses set dangerously high above the ground; there's a further seven racers to go head-to-head against and the visuals look absolutely fantastic. Be warned though, if you can't afford the insane cost that a sit-down machine goes for then your best bet is to try to track down the rather impressive Dreamcast version, which can be found on the *Yu Suzuki Game Works* collection.

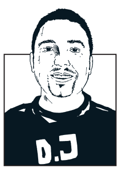


KANE

COWBOYS AND MINI-GAMES



» **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **GENRE:** VARIOUS
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD, ZX SPECTRUM, C64
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

Mini-games are ten a penny nowadays, especially on Nintendo's Wii, but they were actually alive and well all the way back in the Eighties, too.

Way before Wario was even a twinkle in Miyamoto's eye, and before Sega placed its sphere-encased simians into dull and pointless mini-game compilations, titles like *Kane* were offering gamers plenty of variety. Not to mention a whole lot of fun.

While there's a huge amount of difference in quality between the ZX Spectrum, Amstrad and Commodore 64 versions – with the latter being arguably the best – they all play in exactly the same way as each other, which is fortunately very well indeed.

Starting off in a Native American village, Kane's first task is to shoot down as many ducks as he can with a bow and arrow, while the next stage sees the intrepid cowboy leaping on to his horse and galloping into town (leaping over any obstacles that get in his mount's way). After that it's a quick shoot-out at an OK-styled corral, before leaping back in the saddle for a tougher chase after a speeding train.

Yes, the game has issues – the fiddly duck shoot determines how many lives you will have – and the animation on all three versions is absolutely laughable in places, but by goodness is *Kane* a laugh to play. Maybe it was due to the game being part of Mastertronic's £1.99 range, and so providing hours of cheap entertainment, or it might have been because I had an unhealthy obsession with cowboys, but *Kane* is still booted up whenever I fancy a quick laugh.

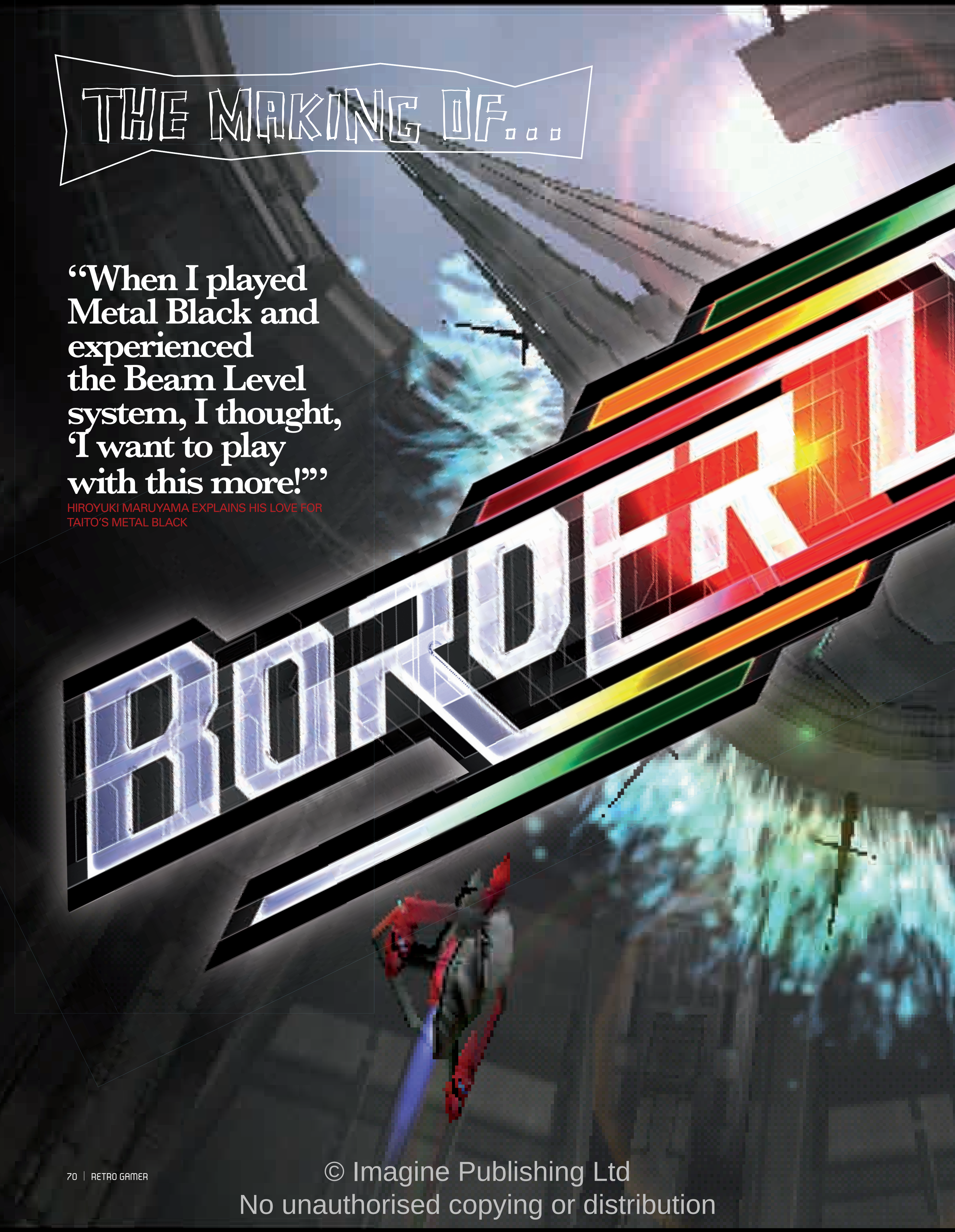
It's certainly not the easiest game in the world – clearing those bushes on Levels 2 and 3 initially results in some very inventive swearing – but its programmers did see fit to include a practice mode on all three versions.

Kane is by no means a classic game, but it does retain a special place in my heart. Oh, and did I mention there are cowboys in it?




Score
400
GUYS KILLED
Score
400
BAD GUYS
SALOON
BANK
STORE
MEN SHOT
Score
400
MEN LEFT
Score
0
SALOON
BANK
STORE
Time Remaining 1.57
Distance To Go
2
SALOON
BANK
Score
Bad Guy
1

THE MAKING OF...



"When I played Metal Black and experienced the Beam Level system, I thought, 'I want to play with this more!'"

HIROYUKI MARUYAMA EXPLAINS HIS LOVE FOR TAITO'S METAL BLACK





» Level 3 culminates in battles between the Red, Green and Yellow Antares ships, whose pilots have lost it. It's like *Gunstar Heroes* all over again…

ONE OF THE MOST HIGHLY REGARDED LATE-ERA DREAMCAST RELEASES, G.REV'S BORDER DOWN WAS POWERED INITIALLY BY ONE MAN'S DREAM, AND THEN BY THE NAOMI ARCADE HARDWARE, BEFORE GOING ON TO BECOME AN EXPENSIVE AND RARE GD-ROM. JONTI DAVIES CHATS WITH THE GAME'S PRODUCER AND G.REV'S PRESIDENT, HIROYUKI MARUYAMA

Gamers are occasionally sniped at by developers of (commercially unsuccessful) leftfield titles for wanting only "more of the same", but in *Border Down*'s case such a strong desire for more of an already-sampled gameplay style led to its creator pushing ahead with production – and *Border Down* is hardly a stereotypical result. "When I played [Taito's 1991 coin-op] *Metal Black* and experienced the Beam Level system, I thought, 'I want to play with this more!' That became a real impetus [for the development of *Border Down*]," says the game's producer, Hiroyuki Maruyama.

The 'Beam Level' gameplay system Maruyama got hooked on in the early Nineties, and which appears in slightly mutated form in his own *Border Down*, provides these games with an alternative take on the weapon power-up operations used by 99 per cent of shmups. Instead of picking up floating symbols to transform/upgrade your ship's weapons, *Border Down* shifts its attention onto the charge of your laser, which increases automatically with the passing of time and is boosted every time an enemy is destroyed. It's a system that is integral to how *Border Down* plays, and one that gives G.rev's game an unusually tactical bent when played for high scores.

It would be a bit facile to describe *Border Down* as a mere homage to *Metal Black*, though. Maruyama explains how *Metal Black* was just one of the influences on his pet project: "Basically, there were various things that influenced *Border Down*, but the influences change with each part of the game. Among those sources of inspiration, obviously a major one was Taito's *Metal Black*. But as for the 'Border System' of stage divergence, well, I produced *G-Darius* while I was working at Taito and that game had a 'Branching Fork' system, but it was really difficult to put together. That served as my excuse [to have another crack at it]. It's an idea centred on not having to develop that many levels if you have parallel worlds. I felt that in the future, if I could work on that idea again, it would be a sweet thing," Maruyama laughs.

The eventual consequence of Maruyama's experience on the *G-Darius* team is seen in *Border Down*'s 'Border System', which splits the game into three concurrent strands of play: the top (green) border is 'For Beginners', the middle (yellow) border 'For Middle-class' players, and the bottom (red) border is reserved 'For Maniacs'. Each level can be approached from three separate perspectives, with each border explored by an alternative ship-pilot team, following separate routes to similar conclusions. It's an ingenious setup, and one that really puts pressure on the player: there's no room for careless life loss, because every life lost forces you to drop to the next, harder border. On the other hand, if you want to see *Border Down* from every angle, you need to play through every border. Each credit can result in a different path through the game.

Another strong influence on *Border Down*'s design came from Maruyama's bookshelf. "For the graphical concept," he reveals, "I took inspiration from Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* novel, which we used a lot as a reference during development." Having not read the book in question, we can't confirm exactly how it informs *Border Down*'s graphical style, but one look at Don Dixon's cover art shows an apparent link between the two projects. We promise Maruyama that we'll add it to our 'to read' list, and he seems happy with that.

Maruyama is a chirpy and upbeat fellow, and his small band of ex-Taito employees have an evident fondness for explosive shmups. They're clearly not in it purely for the money. G.rev (pronounced 'gu-ref', in a Slavic style, even though it's a truncation of 'G.revolution') is such a small unit that it's not really equipped to produce all facets of its games, as Maruyama explains: "There are only five of us here at G.rev – one designer, three programmers, and me. For *Border Down*, and for our other games, we commissioned help from outside the company for sound and extra design work."

It turns out that *Border Down* took root a long time before the game could be realised, and Maruyama had to establish his own company – and secure the necessary capital – before he could get those Antares ships off the ground. "I first had the idea for *Border Down*'s original concept well before I founded G.rev," Maruyama states. "However, from my original game idea only the stage divergence system really

IN THE KNOW



- **» PUBLISHER:** G.REV
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» RELEASED:** 2003
- **» GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £60 TO £100





"G.rev's such a small unit that's not really able to produce all facets of its games"

made it into the final version of *Border Down*. To be honest, the rest of my concept was for a completely different kind of shooting game. After establishing G.rev, my initial objective was to produce an original shooting game. I started planning *Border Down* right away, but to achieve the goals of this original shooting game the company would need the appropriate skills and know-how, as well as capital – which, of course, is the most important factor! Eventually, though, everything came together and I had a chance to put *Border Down* into gradual development." We ask Maruyama how much of his life has been taken up by *Border Down*. "If we start counting from the early planning phase, development took an extremely long time! But the actual production period was only about ten months long…"

G.rev wasn't an independently wealthy company when Maruyama set up shop in Kanagawa prefecture in July 2000, and a lack of capital was one of the team's biggest obstacles when producing *Border Down*. "Because of our ongoing struggle to obtain funding, we had to make various cuts to parts of my original plan for the game – we were left with no option; if we didn't make those cuts, we couldn't have continued with development – but I think positive results came about from some of those cuts," Maruyama reckons.

One of those cuts that had a negative effect resulted in the disappointing ending sequence beyond defeating the final boss. After all that hard work, it would have been nice to see something more than a few anime stills and a closing credits comedown. Maruyama admits to not being happy about how the game ended, and he was also dissatisfied with the quality of the opening sequence: "We wanted to include some production ideas that we couldn't – for example, a 'phantom closing screen'. We also wanted to produce a longer opening sequence, and even now I regret that we didn't do that. I really think we would have been fine without bothering to include the opening scene we ended up using."

Still, such oversights can be forgiven – the playable bulk of the game is a joy to experience, and G.rev can be commended for producing such an interesting, pretty title on a limited budget. The game's boss battles in particular, can end with crescendos of laser fire, resulting in hugely satisfying finales where players are encouraged to time their boss destruction carefully for maximal bonus points. "My personal favourite is the boss at the end of Level 4," Maruyama reveals. "Also, the Level 5 boss was great fun to make…"

Maruyama returns to the subject of Yen: "In the end, we were able to get together most of the capital we needed from producing our first game, *Doki Doki Idol Star Seeker*. The deficit, the amount we still needed over and above that, we supplemented with an accumulation of capital from previous subcontracting work." That freelance work included stints working with Treasure on *Ikaruga* and *Gradius V*, which must have been a valuable experience in both monetary and skill-forming terms.

Ikaruga, in particular, provided G.rev's programming trio with some vital hands-on experience of coding for Sega's NAOMI arcade board. *Doki Doki Idol Star Seeker* (G.rev's first game as an independent developer) was released at roughly the same time as *Ikaruga*, and it too was running on the NAOMI hardware, but *Star Seeker* was a fairly basic puzzle game. Maruyama is a huge fan of Sega's virtually Dreamcast-spec arcade board, though, and programming *Border Down* was made relatively simple by the board's architecture and power. "The NAOMI and Dreamcast hardware was already approaching a transition period, so the development environment was really excellent. As you would expect, developing for this hardware felt like a luxury at the time. But in terms of performance, it wasn't possible to achieve everything we wanted to do at the time. In fact, I'd say around a third of the things we wanted to display, we couldn't – which I still grieve about." Maruyama laughs wryly. "We were planning for a much flashier background, with explosions going on there, but…" He trails off, envisioning what might have been.

By 2003, Sega had effectively pulled the plug on the Dreamcast in Europe and America, but in Japan the console retained some forward momentum. Consoles were still being manufactured in small quantities, and games – now led by NAOMI-to-Dreamcast conversions of 2D shoot-'em-ups – kept the most dedicated of Sega fans enthralled with the evident power of the hardware. *Border Down* appeared in arcades across Japan during April 2003, and by 25 September of the same year it had been converted to the Dreamcast and was being packaged and sold to Sega loyalists nationwide.

Early reactions from Japan's arcade-goers were mixed, however, as Maruyama recalls: "It's a really individualistic type of game, so when we first released it [in the arcades] it received both positive and negative reactions. I'm full of gratitude to the people who came to like *Border Down* [the coin-op]. I'm always thinking, 'It would be great if we could create something even more enjoyable for those players next time.' We feel as though those players [in the arcade] who have come to love our games are really supporting us, G.rev."

Although a Dreamcast conversion of *Border Down* could have been a formality (what with it being a NAOMI title), once the coin-op version of the game was finished G.rev spent some time contemplating which console(s) a conversion would be best suited to. "At that time the only choices other than the Dreamcast were the PS2 and GameCube," Maruyama recalls. "But we decided that porting *Border Down* to the PS2 would incur too many technical difficulties. It wouldn't have been impossible, but we would have had to do virtually everything again, starting over from scratch. If we were going to go to those lengths, we'd be better off just making a completely new PS2 game, we thought. And as for the GameCube, we didn't think *Border Down* really suited its type of user. So, ultimately, we chose to go with the Dreamcast. The biggest factor in this was the ease of porting *Border Down* [from NAOMI to Dreamcast], which in turn enabled us to focus on putting effort into additional components such as the Remix mode. Our final decision was largely influenced by these considerations."





The Dreamcast-exclusive Remix mode Maruyama refers to offers different enemy attack patterns and a slightly realigned balance of play, but these subtle differences were more than sufficient to stir a frenzy among Japan's most dedicated shmup fans. With fewer than 20,000 copies of the Dreamcast version in circulation, *Border Down* has since become one of the most highly prized Japan-exclusive games on the format. As a result, copies typically sell here in Japan for anywhere between 12,000 yen (roughly £60) and 25,000 yen (£125).

Surely G.rev could have ameliorated the situation by producing more copies after *Border Down*'s initial release? "When we first launched *Border Down*, the orders we received exceeded our expectations – and those of Sega," says Maruyama. "After release, we continued producing copies for a while and we thought there were enough copies being distributed in the market, so at that time we didn't think the game's value was likely to increase. At the beginning of this year we did another production run and sold the new copies exclusively through Messe Sanoh. Those copies have already sold out. So I'd just like to say thank you to everyone! And the number of copies we sold this year… well, that's a secret!" Maruyama is laughing, but probably not all the way to the bank.



» Brief cut-scenes precede each level, but Hiroyuki Maruyama was disappointed with *Border Down*'s opening and ending sequences.



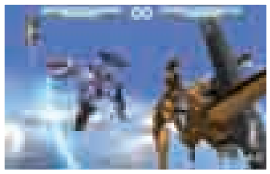
» Laser interference, which damages anything within range of its field, occurs when a beam from the player's ship is met with a countering laser from a boss.

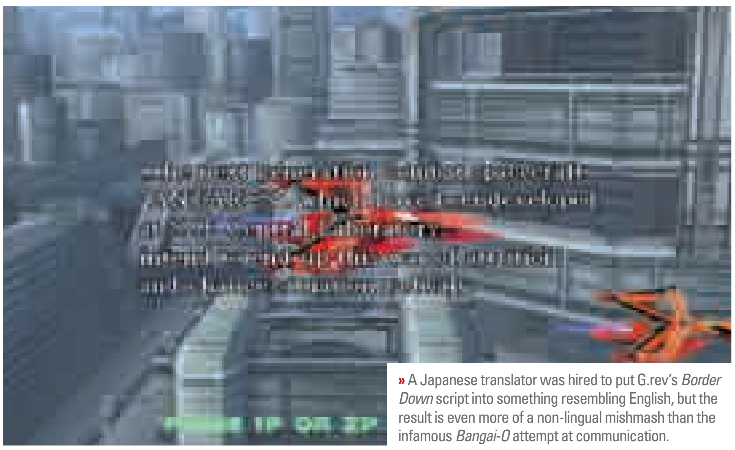
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DOKI DOKI IDOL STAR SEEKER
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2001

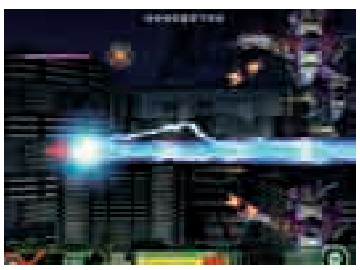
UNDER DEFEAT
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2005

SENKO NO RONDE (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2005





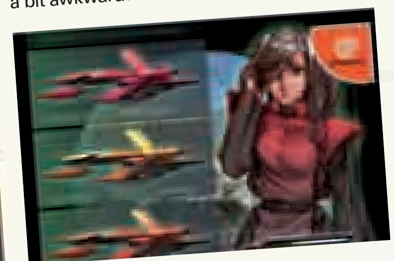
» A Japanese translator was hired to put G.rev's *Border Down* script into something resembling English, but the result is even more of a non-lingual mishmash than the infamous *Bangai-O* attempt at communication.





HOW MUCH?!

While G.rev's Dreamcast debut, the anime-gal-packed puzzle-game that is *Doki Doki Idol Star Seeker Remix*, sells in Japan for around 4,000 yen (£20), the company's subsequent shmup excursions are much more expensive. *Border Down* can go for anything up to 25,000 yen (£125) in Japan, while *Under Defeat* tends to fetch 20,000 yen (£100). "Even second-hand, a lot of our games are comparatively expensive," Maruyama concurs. "I think it's because we manufacture just the right number of games [to satisfy initial demand]. As long as they're not too expensive (or too cheap), I think this is a good model. When they get really expensive, I feel a bit awkward!"

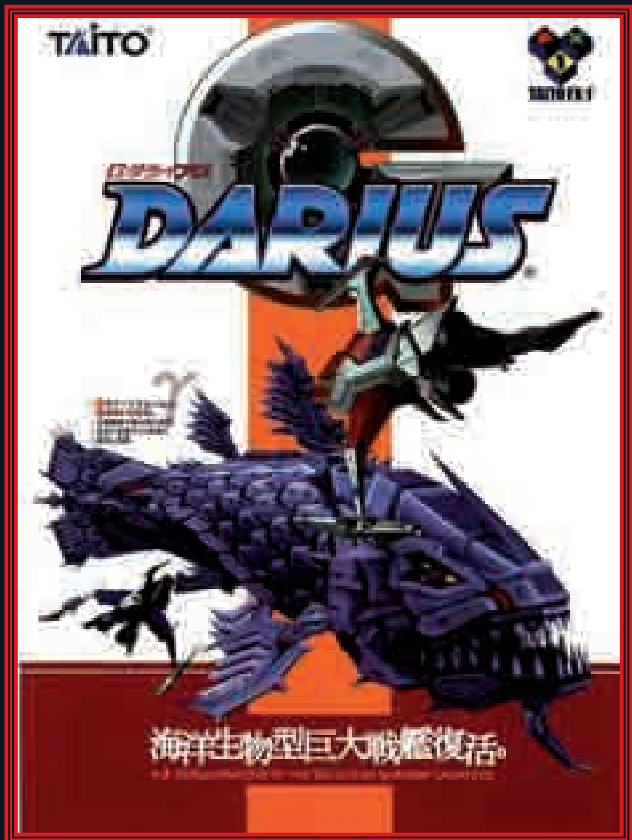


BORDER DOWN OST



The only *Border Down* contributor who worked on Taito's *Metal Black* is Yasuhisa Watanabe, composer of both games' soundtracks. His work on *Border Down* is idiosyncratic and pulsating, reminiscent in places of Susumu Yokota's lilting off-key house excursions, and in other areas recalling the cheesier side of Yellow Magic Orchestra. Overall, Watanabe's score is strong enough to stand on its own, which is part of the reason (along with generous fan service) for the *Border Down* OST being included in the Limited Edition version of the game. The soundtrack is also available separately for those who have only the Standard Edition of *Border Down*; while a second album has also just been released.

HORIZONTAL SHOOT-'EM-UP GALLERY



G-Darius Year Released: 1997



Last Resort Year Released: 1992



Xexex Year Released: 1991



R-Type Leo Year Released: 1992



Salamander Year Released: 1986



Metal Black Year Released: 1991



U.N. Squadron Year Released: 1989



X Multiply Year Released: 1989

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: ALLY NOBLE

DATE OF BIRTH: "8 MAY. I FORGET THE YEAR…"

FIRST JOB: TOMATO PICKER

CURRENTLY: SENIOR PRODUCER, DISTINCTIVE DEVELOPMENTS

FAVOURITE FILM: THE LAVENDER HILL MOB

ALLY NOBLE

SHE'S BEEN PART OF THE LIVERPOOL GAMES INDUSTRY SINCE IMAGINE WAS HYPING BANDERSNATCH. WIRRAL-BORN ALLY NOBLE CO-FOUNDED SEMINAL DEVELOPERS DENTON DESIGNS, DANCED WITH FRANKIE AND IS CURRENTLY GETTING MOBILE WITH LARA. PAUL DRURY ASKS HER ABOUT MEGAGAMES, MEXICANS AND MULLETS

For a girl who'd grown up without a record player let alone a home computer and hadn't even seen a videogame until she got to art college, you might have expected Ally Noble to cautiously dip her toe into the world of game development. Instead she jumped in with both feet. Literally.

"The first thing I worked on was *Pedro*," she giggles, recalling the stomping Mexican gardener with pest problems. "I did the tramp sprite and remember agonising about what to put in to those two frames of animation!"

Ally had been recruited by Imagine Software, who'd recently signed a lucrative deal with Marshall Cavendish to produce a game for each issue of its *Input* magazine. Ally's degree in graphic design and predilection for the unusual caught the company's eye and she was pleasantly surprised to meet up with old college friend Steve Cain at the interview. Imagine saw their potential and took them on. Soon Ally was busy sketching out the cave for *B.C. Bill* on graph paper, before reading out the binary code for the programmer to tap into the target machine. "I'd be doing the sprites for six different machines and each platform needed some tweaking. Some had more oblong pixels, the Speccy's were very square and the Amstrad had this lovely shade of pink," she recalls, wistfully.

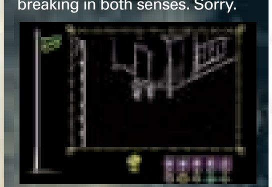
Her talents were growing, as were Imagine's ambitions. Despite the Marshall Cavendish deal dissolving in a financial mess, the company boldly announced it was moving its best people into a special section of the building to work on two 'Megagames': *Bandersnatch* for the Spectrum and *Psyclapse* for the C64.

"We were told it was this revolutionary thing, this add-on pack with extra memory," explains Ally, "and we were going to

YOU MUST PLAY…

The Great Escape

Ally's been involved with such a diverse and ambitious bunch of games, highlighting one is tough but former **RG** editor Martyn Carroll picks this and who are we to argue. *The Great Escape* is a great showcase for her artistic talents and exhibits a wealth of innovative gameplay ideas. Sneaking past guards, secreting objects for later use, learning the routine of the camp and knowing when to act and when to keep your head down make this engaging. One of a number of excellent collaborations with coder John Heap, this is ground-breaking in both senses. Sorry.







» **Above:** Ally isn't all pixels. Here's some of her lovely glasswork.
Right: B.C. Bill prepares for his appearance on *Jeremy Kyle*.



» **Above:** *Cosmic Wartoad*: "That was one of Steve and John's," says Ally. "Really weird graphics." More power to the imbibers!

change the history of computer games *and* save the company!"

No pressure there, then. Imagine mercilessly hyped up the projects, including some famous magazine adverts featuring the star-studded development team, including Ally sporting a fantastic spiky mullet beneath the legend, 'Reinforcements Arrive!' She laughs self-consciously when reminded of that particular hairdo but is more positive about the possibilities the new hardware offered.

happen. And we worked hard. I remember going in everyday over one Easter. That was just before Imagine went down…"

Yes, Ally was there when the bubble burst, famously captured on film in the *Commercial Breaks* TV documentary. While colleagues were being summarily dismissed, the Megagames team was protected from the swingeing cuts. Even when Imagine crashed and burned, director Dave Lawson saw the *Bandersnatch* bunch as an asset and

"THERE WAS SOME GENERAL IMBIBING BUT I COULDN'T POSSIBLY SAY WITH WHAT. WE EVENTUALLY PUT A STOP TO IT IN OFFICE HOURS…" ALLY SHEDS LIGHT ON THE SOURCE OF SOME OF THOSE CRAZY DENTON DESIGNS

"As an artist it was really exciting. Suddenly I had more frames of animation than I could imagine for the main character in *Bandersnatch*. He was tall, slim and wore a boiler suit tucked into boots. We had him walking around in a level and touching switches, but that's as far as it got. People around us got carried away, like the sky was the limit. Did we? We thought the work we were doing was good but we weren't sure whether all this other stuff, like the add-on pack, would

moved them into his house at Caldy on the Wirral, with talk of attracting US money.

'He had this plan that people would buy us as a team, so we could carry on working on our ideas. He got us hyped up and there was talk of us being bought by Atari. We weren't being paid but Caldy was a nice place. We'd play football on the beach and after a while we thought, if he can do it, why can't we?'

So the 5-a-side team of Ally, Steve Cain, John Gibson, Karen Davies and Graham



» The Denton crew (L-R) Ally, John Heap, Dave Colclough, John Gibson, Steve Cain, Karen Davies. The Frankie posters on the wall were pixelated out as the interview where this was taken was focused on *Shadowfire*, trivia fans.

'Kenny' Everett strode out onto the pitch as Denton Designs. They'd bought the name off the shelf (Ally favoured 'Selectomatic') and decided on a two-pronged attack. A publishing deal was struck with Beyond while Dave Ward of Ocean showed his belief in the team by buying the *Bandersnatch* dev system from the receivers and renting offices in Liverpool's Rodney Street for them, in return for a game in time for Christmas 1984.

Dave's faith was rewarded with the impressive *Gift From The Gods*, a game that shared more than just its hardware with the ill-fated Spectrum Megagame. "They both came out of John Gibson's head and *Bandersnatch* would have been a sideways scrolling game, too," says Ally. "There was no physical code but the main character came from what I'd learned on *Bandersnatch*. The development system was a Sage computer with a four-and-a-half inch floppy drive and a green screen display. You could pump the graphics down this cable and see what it would look like on the target machine. We used that system at Denton for years…"

Meanwhile, Kenny, Steve and Karen were delivering *Shadowfire* to a delighted Beyond. The highly innovative icon-driven adventure not only showcased Denton's technical prowess, the squad-based mechanic and inclusion of a strong female character in Sevrina shows some prescient, out-of-the-box thinking. Which may explain why it was happy to take the unusual step of turning a band into a game.

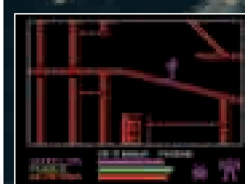
"We battled to get the *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* game," laughs Ally. "It was an organic growth. We didn't have a main character until near the end. The idea of the shadow, the elements of his personality and using the symbols came together late. In those days you made it up as you went along! And when it came out, it knocked *Shadowfire* off the number one spot in the Gallup chart. That's the best moment of my career so far."

Yet, just as Denton Designs was riding high, cracks began to appear. The original five directors had run the company like a co-operative, each having an equal say and share holding, but success had led to expansion and the necessity of taking on



ARTISTS IN DISGUISE

"We still had the original team and they wanted to do creative stuff," says Ally of the terrible *Transformers*. "There was a lot riding on it, but they didn't want to do the licence. Nobody got on with it till it was close to the end! I remember I was supposed to go to Amsterdam and there was nobody to do the Speccy graphics. I didn't go and sat for a week and did them all. It was a high point personally, but a low for the company. People wanted to be more creative than they thought they could be with that licence. Everyone was so into being an artist and not selling their soul. That's partly what split Dentons – the pull between commercial pressures and wanting to be artists. We were being asked to do more commercial stuff, especially by Ocean, and [the original directors] didn't want to do it. My position? I was trained as a graphic designer and you're there to sell product. I was happy to work to a brief and a deadline. That's where I get my joy. Doing something good with those restrictions. That's what I enjoyed about the Speccy – the restriction. Very twisted!"

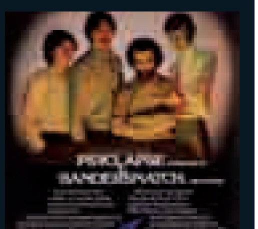


DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?

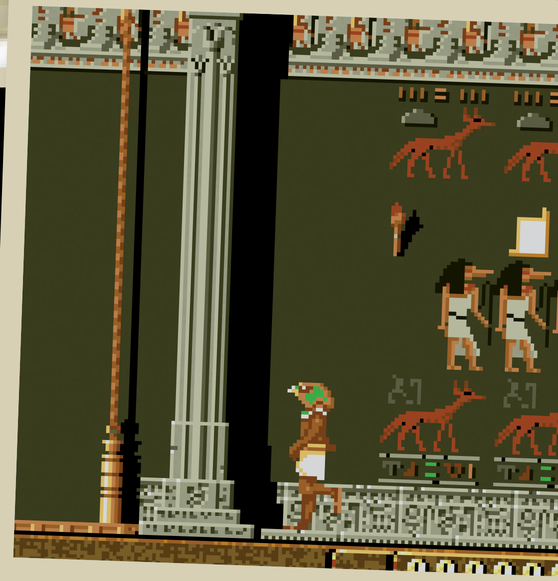
IN THE ATTIC

Those of you who noted the reference Matthew Smith made in **RG** 48 to a box full of his memorabilia (including the original maps for *Jet Set Willy* and the metallic green Spectrum he programmed *Manic Miner* on, no less) left in a loft in Liverpool in the mid-Nineties, will be intrigued to know we have news of another Speccy treasure chest gathering dust under the eves. "In the early Eighties, I was still doing my graphics on graph paper," explains Ally. "I remember keeping my *Bandersnatch* work because I was really proud of it – the logo and some original artwork. It's all in the attic of a house I used to live in which I rent out now." She's also kept copies of all the games she's ever worked on, including some that were never released – **RG** is currently planning a live-action version of *Atic Atac* and you'll read about any valuable discoveries here. Oh and so Commodore lovers don't feel left out, now we know what development system was used for C64 Megagame *Psyclapse*, our own Richard Burton might just have some exciting news to share soon…





» *Gift From The Gods* gave Denton Designs a blessed beginning and was a hint of what *Bandersnatch* might have looked like…



» Ally: "About three other Egyptian-themed games came out about the time of *Eye Of Horus*. We reckon it was due to this Colman's mustard ad with hieroglyphics in!"

employees. Ally recalls the meeting where things came to a head.

"We all met at someone's house and discussed everything. The employees wanted to be part of it, to have shares, but my feeling is that the other directors didn't want to give them that. The outcome was that the other four left and I stayed with the employees. We were all in it together as far as I was concerned, to make the best product we could."

The noble thing to do, and true to her word, Ally was soon working with coder John Heap on one of Dentons' high points – *The Great Escape*. "We both liked the board game when we were kids. John thought the routine of the camp would be cool to program, then the other stuff underneath where you had control of somebody who could do things of their own free will."

With its ingenious structure and distinctive isometric graphics the game remains a Spectrum classic and led to a further collaboration on *Where Time Stood Still*, which saw Ally taking on a great design role, agonising over the layout of its tricky swamp section. There was to be a third instalment in this loose trilogy, *Wreckers*, but though development began on the Spectrum, Ally feels sure the code was never completed – which makes the complimentary review which appeared in *Crash* issue 88 something of an anomaly…

You may have noticed that **RG** has politely concentrated on Ally's triumphs, but not everything Dentons touched turned to gaming gold. *Transformers* was a missed opportunity (see boxout 'Artists In Disguise') and *Roland Rat* is best forgotten, but even when ideas didn't gel, their titles usually showed a willingness to try something new. Tying a Viking and a knight together with bungee rope in *Bounces* or the evolutionary concept behind *Eco* were certainly novel, though one can't help wondering if Ocean's Gary Bracey was on the money when he suggested development of the latter was "fuelled by mind-altering substances".

"WE WERE TOLD THE MEGAGAMES WERE GOING TO CHANGE THE HISTORY OF COMPUTER GAMES AND SAVE THE COMPANY!" ALLY RECALLS IMAGINE'S CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM FOR BANDERSNATCH AND PSYCLAPSE

"Erm, there was some general imbibing, but I couldn't possibly say with what," laughs Ally. "In office hours? We did eventually put a stop to that…"

As the Nineties dawned, Dentons moved up to the 16-bits, finally releasing *Wreckers* through Audiogenic. Its output remained admirably diverse, ranging from the Egyptian-themed *Eye Of Horus* to a plucky conversion of *Mortal Kombat 3* for the Game Boy. "Rage told us it was still selling a year after release," remembers Ally. "Typical – we weren't on royalties! At Dentons we'd always had critical acclaim, but never really made any money."

It was to be the final release under the Denton name. By 1995, Ally and her long-time collaborator John Heap decided they were stretching themselves too thinly and became part of Rage PLC. Ally increasingly took on a more administrative role and soon became a producer, overseeing such projects as *Wild Wild Racing* and *Space Debris* for the PS2.

When Rage collapsed in 2003, Ally moved into mobile gaming, enjoying the small teams and short development times, and is now with Distinctive Developments working on *FIFA 09* and *Tomb Raider 8*. So, after a quarter of a century in the games biz, we wonder if she still gets pointed at for being a girl.

Ally thinks for a while. "Yeah, there were times when I was treated differently, but I wouldn't let that get to me. It's still a boy's club and you know there's nothing wrong with that. I like them!"

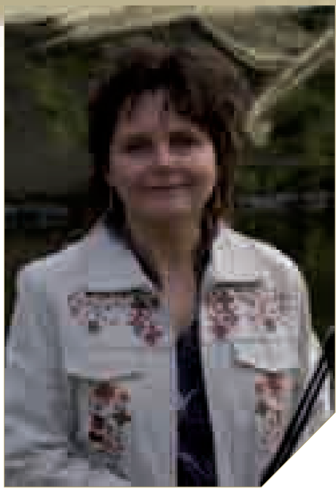
ABSENT FRIENDS

Ally would like to dedicate this article to two fellow directors of Denton Designs, Steve Cain and Dave Colclough, who are tragically no longer with us. "Dave was a gentle giant programmer. He just wanted to do a good game and he loved programming and his motorbike. Steve had such an unusual view of the world. I still find it hard to imagine that someone with such a huge love of games, graphics, birds and Rembrandt is no longer here. He was so enthusiastic, so larger than life. They were both talented, creative people and it's really sad that cancer took them long before their time."

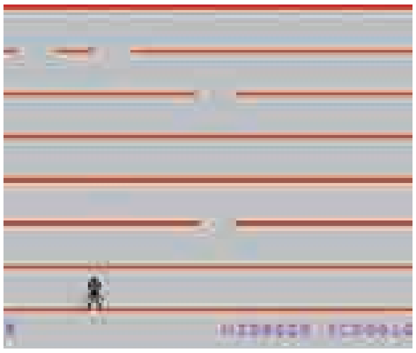


» (L-R) John Gibson, Karen Davies, Steve Cain, Kenny and Ally gathered around *Gift From The Gods*.





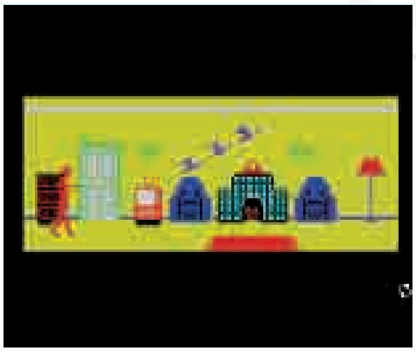
ALLY NOBLE DESERT ISLAND DISKS



JUMPING JACK

SPECTRUM

1 First game I played that I really got addicted to. This little stick man with a big head running along a platform with gaps you had to jump over and as it went on, they got bigger and it got faster. The most stupidly annoying thing in the world and I was just completely addicted to it.



FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

SPECTRUM

2 I really loved working on it and I thought it was quite innovative when it came out. Yeah, there's some vanity in choosing it but you only get one life. If I had nine choices, I'd take *Where Time Stood Still*, too, which was a very personal highlight for me in terms of graphics and game design.



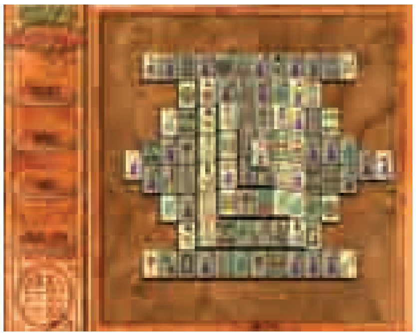
TETRIS GAME BOY

3 The repetition, the fact it speeds up gently… I couldn't put it down. I'd still be awake at three in the morning and then have *Tetris* dreams. It's the only game that's kept me up till that time.



TIME CRISIS PLAYSTATION

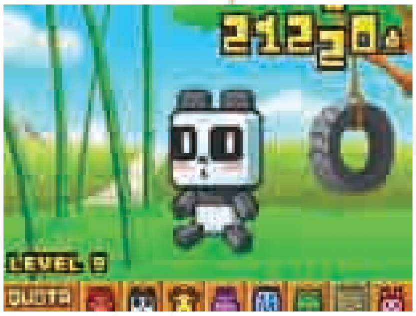
4 A bit unusual for me in that it's a shooter. That gun! It was just so much fun having the gun and pointing it at a telly! The levels were just so incredibly well designed. You could really learn how to get through and it wasn't too fast and furious for me… I could cope with it.



MAHJONG

ANY PLATFORM

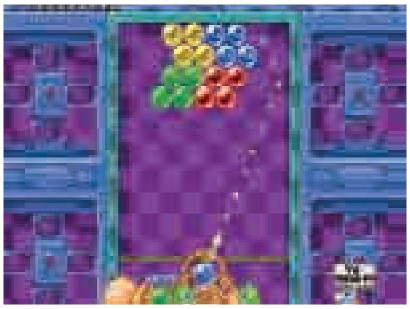
5 That nice oriental feel. The different shapes and patterns and matching the blocks. Just one of those things that gets you. Simple but effective.



ZOO KEEPER

NINTENDO DS

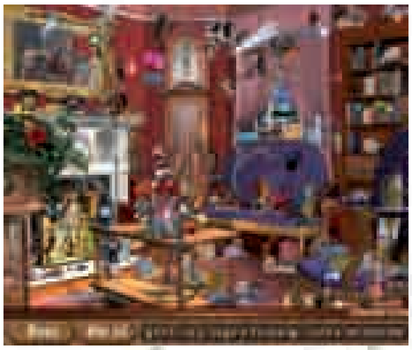
6 On the internet first and then the DS. Another addictive matching tiles game and lovely animation. I just really like puzzle games… yeah, I carry round my DS but I think I've killed my dog. I daren't look…



PUZZLE BOBBLE

ANY PLATFORM

7 A game I've played through my whole career and I played it on the train last night. I played it on a home conversion first, I think. Maybe the Amiga. But now I play it on my phone. And one game can easily last me one-and-a-half hours.



HIDDEN OBJECT GAMES ONLINE

8 Madness you find on the net. Go to Big Fish Games and you can buy them for a few quid. For example, you're a detective looking for clues in a picture. Nice graphics, great details, of a roll-top desk from the Thirties and you have to find a list of objects and they might be in monochrome on the wallpaper or peeping out from behind something…

› ALLY NOBLE

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



SirClive: *World Class Rugby* was a great version of a really dull sport. Being a Manchester company, was Denton Designs not tempted to make a football game?
We weren't a Manchester company, we were a Liverpool company, but I guess it's still relevant. No – but we did do an American football game!

JetSetWilly: Was there anything you wanted to put into *The Great Escape* but couldn't because of memory restraints and would you ever consider doing a remake?
We had to cut the map down by about a third and cut out loads of graphics because we didn't have enough memory. The original map had lots of things you might find in Colditz. I'm sure we had water butts, barrels and boxes you could get into and the bit in the tunnel was much smaller than it was meant to be. And the part where you had to avoid the spotlight – we wanted to do a lot more with that lighting effect… so yeah, if someone was going to commission it then I guess John and I would do it. Put that out – we'll do it!

Pantaloons: What Spectrum game would you most like to have been involved with?
I really liked the Ultimate games. I think I'd have liked to be part of them. *Knightlore* in particular.

Paranoid Marvin: *Batman Returns* – what went so wrong?
Can't remember! I think by the time we got given it, there was hardly any time to the deadline. It wasn't working out for [the original developers] so they handed it over to us. For me, it was great to be able to use stills from the film. I had a way of digitising them and drawing on to them, so you got something that wasn't a photo but not completely hand drawn – a halfway house that was quite an unusual style at the time.

Necronom: The *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* game is quite unusual. Did the band approach you to make a game about them in the first place?
ZTT had approached Ocean and they approached us. I knew some of the band from my art college days. I used to go dancing with Paul [the moustached one: think Bez joining Village People – Disco Ed] at a gay club in town. We met Paul Morley from their record company and started working on ideas. We were very enthusiastic. They got us tickets to see Frankie Goes To Hollywood play in Liverpool during the height of their fame, which was ace!

Darran 'The Master' Jones: Who is your favourite Dr Who?
God, that's so difficult. Years ago I liked Jon Pertwee, he was such a dandy, but then obviously Tom Baker was good… then the two recent ones who've both been fantastic. I think I'd go for Christopher Ecclestone – he's a bit hard.

Merman: What influenced your graphical style and did you use any special utilities when creating 8-bit and 16-bit graphics?
My style came from wanting to get things right and realistic. For *The Great Escape* I did actually look at uniforms, where the great coats ended, just to get it right. So my style comes from research! As for utilities, we wrote some ourselves but I loved doing Spectrum title screens with Melbourne Draw and DPaint for the Amiga was great too.

Marcopoloman: At Denton Designs, were there any 'playground' fights about what system was the best?
Constantly! Not fisticuffs, but people constantly bantering about what the Spectrum had and what the Commodore had. People like Dave Colclough thought the 64 was fantastic. He loved it and would wax lyrical about what it could do, how sophisticated it was. The programmers would bitch all the time. Was I above all of it? Oh no. I loved the Spectrum!

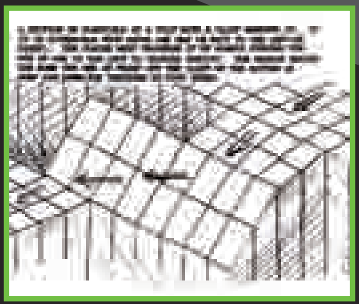
TheDude18: What is your favourite WWII film?
655 Squadron, quickly followed by *The Dambusters*.

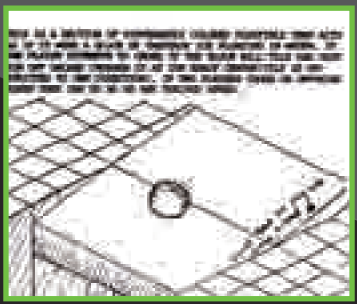
MikeB: Which is your favourite – Frankie the band or *Frankie* the game?
That's tough. I saw Frankie Goes To Hollywood before they'd released anything at Larks in the Park in Liverpool. They were really good. They had this real energy and you could tell they were going to be something. You can't beat some of those singles. *Relax* was my favourite – loved the video. But then I really like the game… too tough too call. Sorry.

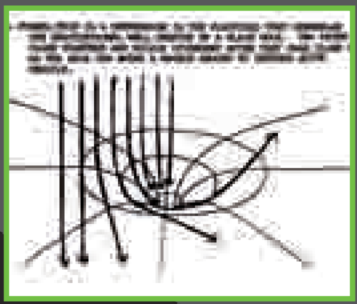
For your chance to quiz future castaways please visit the **Retro Gamer** forums at www.retrogamer.net/forum

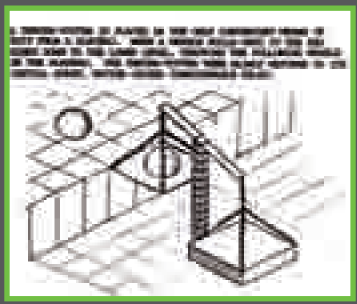
THE MAKING OF…

MARBLE MADNESS









ONE OF THE MOST DISTINCTIVE ARCADE TITLES EVER, MARBLE MADNESS MARRIES ESCHER INFLUENCES WITH CLINICAL ABSTRACTION IN ITS PRECISE LANDSCAPES. BUT BENEATH ITS SURFACE IS A COMPELLING RACE AGAINST TIME. CRAIG GRANNELL TALKS TO DESIGNER MARK CERNY ABOUT HIS MUCH-LOVED CREATION

IN THE KNOW



» **DEVELOPER:** ATARI GAMES

» **RELEASED:** 1984

» **PLATFORMS:** ARCADE; CONVERTED TO: AMIGA, APPLE II, ATARI ST, C64, GAME BOY, GAME BOY ADVANCE, GAME BOY COLOR, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, MOBILE, NES, PC, TANDY, ZX SPECTRUM

» **GENRE:** ARCADE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £700+ FOR A CABINET; £1+ FOR HOME CONVERSIONS

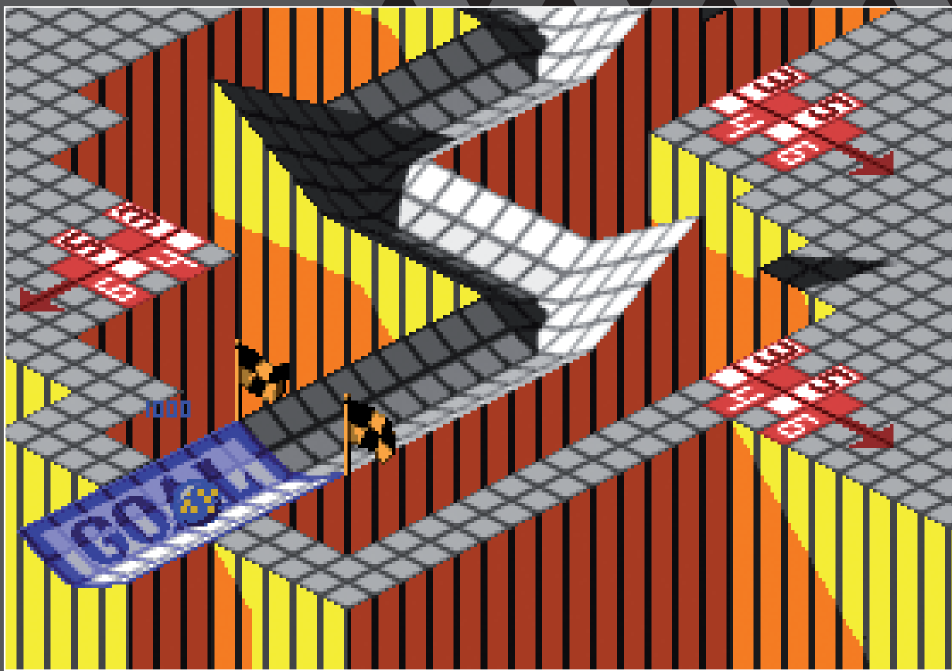
The Atari Games of the early Eighties was tough. You had to come up with your own game concepts, each offering a distinct experience, preferably with new controls, the thinking being that unique systems – *Missile Command*'s buttons, *Tempest*'s spinner – drew in players. Also, the deteriorating economics of American arcades meant that new games required a simultaneous two-player mode. "My assignment was to put these things together – a unique concept, new controls, and a two-player game," explains Mark Cerny, an avid arcade gamer who'd managed to find his way to Atari at the tender age of 17.

Contrary to widely reported, but totally inaccurate, rumours about him winning a design contest to work at Atari, Mark actually arrived at the company via a reporter writing a book on arcade game tips. "He hooked me up with Atari's VP of product design. For some reason, Atari thought a teenage hobbyist programmer would make a nice addition to the company's staff," remembers Mark, who was keen to work on arcade games, due to consoles of the time being limited in terms of graphics and controls.

According to Mark, the original inspiration behind *Marble Madness* – a game that, when stripped back, essentially tasks players with guiding a marble through six treacherous courses against the clock – was miniature golf. "I loved the idea of a playfield's contours influencing the ball's path, and I spent evenings working on various approaches with Atari's art system, before settling on the idea of using an isometric grid," remembers Mark. Next, a decision needed to be made regarding what players would do on the playfield: "I floated the concept of hitting the ball, like in miniature golf, but that didn't get anyone too excited, and so I started thinking about a racing game, with long tracks and a human or computer-controlled opponent."

When it became obvious that the technology of the time couldn't adequately cope with the physics for such a game, the concept morphed into a race against time, pitting the player against tricky courses and obstacles. "The two-player idea integrated well with this – we just needed to double up the controls and have the trailing player 'killed' and transported forwards, with a time penalty, to join the leading player," says Mark. "But the final requirement – unique controls – was hard to come up with."

Eventually, Mark decided to go with a motorised trackball, which could spin faster if the ball was rolling downhill, or slow down the ball if braked. Unfortunately for Mark, however, prototypes fell foul of what Atari's design department referred to as the 'milk stool' problem. "A trackball is supported on three spots – two rotate and a third is a passive support," explains Mark. "Three supports means stability, like with a tripod, but when you want to motorise a trackball, you need a fourth support – two for rotation and two for driving motors. At this point, the mechanism becomes enormously



» For a bonus, accomplished players can leap off the angled ramp in this shot, landing at the far left.

finicky. Think of a four-legged table or stool – everything needs very careful placement for it to be stable, and one leg often makes poor contact."

In the end, the motorised trackball proved unfeasible and costly, and the idea was dropped. However, the standard trackball remained, something Mark considered vital to the success of the project. With only two of the three primary objectives for *Marble Madness* – a new concept and a two-player game – now being met, Mark had his work cut out to ensure the resulting product was up to scratch.

Along with Bob Flanagan, Mark began programming the game in C – a first for Atari Games, which had previously used assembly language. "Using C meant the game was easier than usual to program, although with C being a less efficient language, *Marble Madness* only ran at 30Hz rather than the usual 60," recalls Mark.

Despite the ease of programming, Mark had big plans for the game's hardware, the intention being to base *Marble Madness* around a powerful custom chip. "It was supposed to have exotic new features like RAM sprites, where a few sprites could be bitmaps animated by the CPU, rather than the usual ROM-based static sprites," says Mark. "This was exciting, and I thought I could have the steel marbles reflect the environment and the players' marbles show a refracted version." Unfortunately, the hardware used ended up being the fairly conventional and rather unfortunately named 'Budget System', with standard ROM sprites.

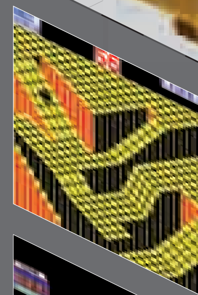
Other ambitious ideas also fell by the wayside. "I had an idea about animated playfields, with a 'wave' chasing the player, like something coming at you from under a carpet," recalls Mark. "But that turned out to be extremely difficult to implement, and after a month I gave up."

But as is so often the case, limitations proved to be beneficial. Forced to simplify, Mark crafted a visual design that's pure and timeless. "Escher was a huge influence – four of his prints were on the walls of the house I grew up in," Mark reveals. "But the game's graphic design also reflects my limited art skills – it was something that could be calculated rather than drawn." Rather than drawing levels pixel by pixel, Mark hit upon a pre-rendered solution and wrote a simple ray-tracer that generated the playfields from a height map. "Since the playfields were generated offline, I could do quite a bit of computation to generate them," he says. "That meant I could anti-alias them, for a softer look, and I could have shadows, which added an extra dimension to the game's visuals."

Mark's level generator also left extra time for designing and experimenting with components and obstacles for each level. "Given the difficulties of implementing content in those days, it was easier to come up with track concepts than to

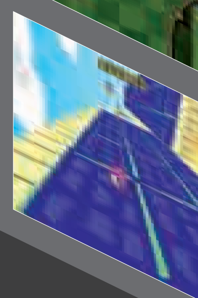


PRETENDERS TO THE THRONE









Gyroscope (1986)
The first clone out of the blocks, Melbourne House's effort met with a mixed reception. It's not bad, especially on the Speccy, but its courses aren't nearly as devious as Cerny's creations.

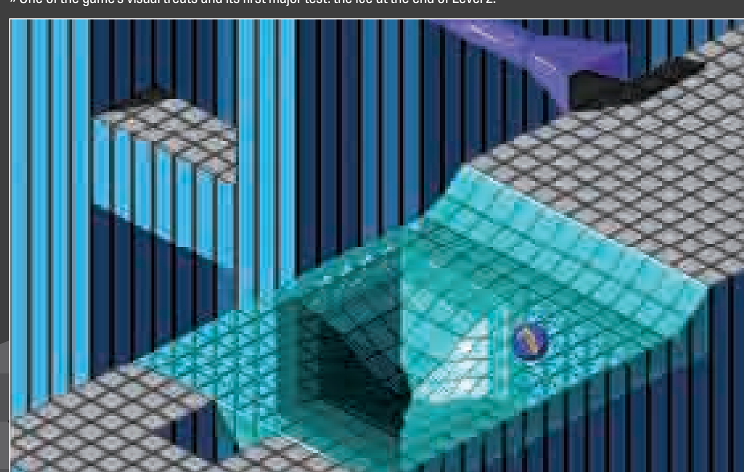
Spindizzy (1986)
Crossing *Marble Madness* with an arcade adventure and a block of granite ('cos it's so hard, see?), Paul Shirley's game made reviewers all happy in their 'funny' places – *Zzap!64* gave it 98%.

Super Monkey Ball (2000)
Despite tilting the landscape rather than moving the marble, Sega's simian adventure owes a debt of gratitude to Mark Cerny, and its popularity was in no doubt down to finely tuned analogue controls and treacherous courses.

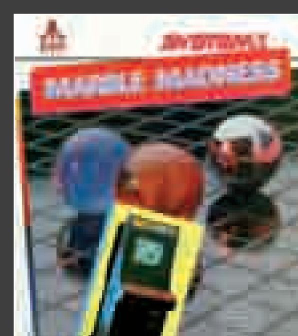
Marble Blast Gold/Ultra (2003/2006)
This pair of titles are almost *Spindizzy* crossed with *SMB* (so, *Marble Madness* twice or thrice removed, or something), offering plenty of marble, erm, madness, in a rich and vibrant hazard-strewn landscape.



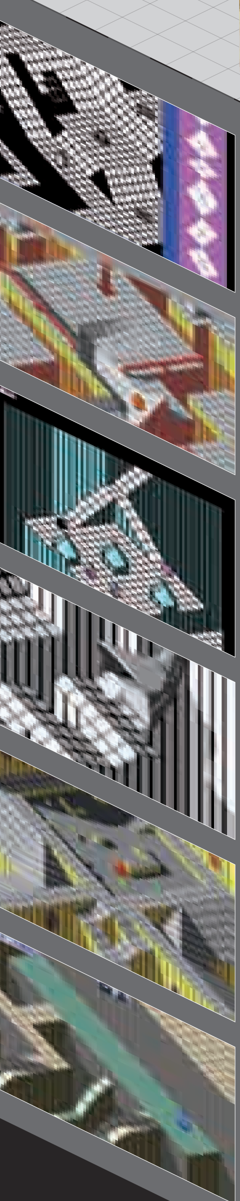
» Level 2 introduces the psychotic black Steelies and slug-like marble munchers.



» One of the game's visual treats and its first major test: the ice at the end of Level 2.







CONVERSION CAPERS

ZX Spectrum (1986)
Available in original and 'deluxe' flavours, the Speccy and CPC conversions offer a construction kit. Unfortunately, they also offer ropey collision detection, poor visuals, and irksome flick-screen scrolling with instant deaths that mirrors *Jet Set Willy*. Avoid.

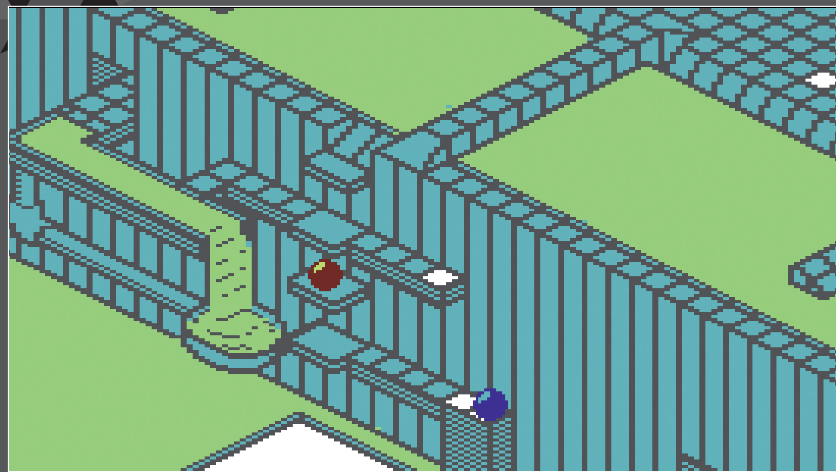
Amiga (1986)
One of the best coin-op conversions of its era, the Amiga release wasn't eclipsed for five years. Although the aesthetics are on a par with the original, it's the gameplay that really shines through in this version, largely due to the analogue control options.

PC (1986)
Awarded 79% by a presumably drunk *Games Machine* team in 1987, this dreadful effort marries nasty CGA graphics with a hateful keyboard control scheme, topping it off with spindly courses and audio that's less pleasing than fingernails down a chalkboard.

Game Boy (1991)
Squeezing the coin-op into Nintendo's black-and-white handheld was never going to be an easy task, but this monochrome conversion is surprisingly playable, if a mite frustrating at times, due to its small view area and occasionally iffy collision detection.

Mega Drive (1991)
Despite its digital-only controls, this conversion is fairly close to being arcade-perfect, pipping the Amiga release in terms of visuals and sound. Difficulty and control options add to a decent package for anyone wanting a home version of Cerny's classic.

Game Boy Advance (2005)
Amazingly, 2005's GBA conversion, released in a double pack with *Klax*, is the worst of the lot. Upon playing, you might think something's missing, and you'd be right: Steelies, animations and three entire levels have been cut from this lamentable effort.



» [C64] The C64 conversion has a secret water level that even Mark Cerny was unaware of. It's two-player only and stupidly hard, however.

actually make them. Many ideas remained on paper in various design documents," responds Mark, when we ask how he approached level design for *Marble Madness*. "Practicality was the biggest issue when it came to choosing ideas to implement. For example, it wasn't possible to make a good-looking elastic barricade that stretched across the playfield. Also, my interests drifted during the course of the project, and so new ideas – such as Level 4's vacuum cleaners – were used, rather than something from the design documents."

With the game's diminutive enemies – evil black marbles that are referred to as 'Steelies', slug-like marble-munchers, roaming acid pools, and more – things were different. These were down to Sam Comstock, who Mark refers to as "a talented artist who could have animated anything." Due to sprite limitations, the enemies had to remain small, and Mark recalls that the one other definite rule was 'no faces': "The thinking was something that could have character, but not actually be a character. I thought a minimal aesthetic would match the playfields, hence the lack of eyes and heads for the creatures."



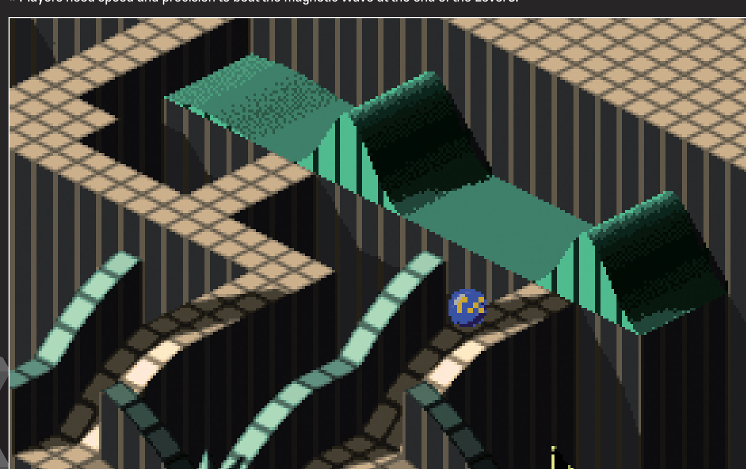
A final touch was added to the game via its jaunty tunes. Although Mark had nothing directly to do with the game's sound, he nevertheless seems proud of it. "The music is great, isn't it?" he beams. He notes that *Marble Madness* used an FM chip by Yamaha, and this was a first for Atari Games and perhaps even the coin-op industry as a whole. "The game's sound designers, Brad Fuller and Hal Canon, spent months investigating the ins and outs of the chip," he adds, noting that our favourite composition – for the Beginner level – was the first the pair created.

As *Marble Madness* neared completion, in-house focus tests suggested it was a winner, which met with relief from its creator: "I'd been at Atari for nearly three years by then, and the reaction to most of my work was, uh, lukewarm. So it was really nice to see players get into the game." The games-playing public also flocked to the new creation, and several thousand machines were shipped, although the game's lack of longevity soon became apparent. "In those days, success and failure were based on game length – if a typical game lasted two-and-a-half minutes: success! A minute longer: failure! So, a 'simple to learn, hard to master' mechanic meant players got reasonable value for their first coin, but couldn't play on without plenty of practice," says Mark. "With most games, income tended to be high and drop off as players mastered them and got more time for their money, but with *Marble Madness* being only four minutes long, players eventually finished the six stages and moved to other games," he explains. "In our post-publication tracking, we watched *Marble Madness* be the number-one-earning game in all 18 arcades we sampled,

» Roaming acid pools catch an unwary marble, although this can make progress faster, rather than you waiting for gaps.



» Players need speed and precision to beat the magnetic wave at the end of the Level 3.

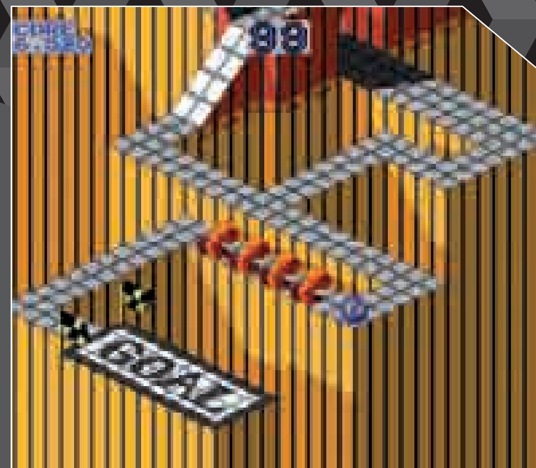




» The catapult flings the marble through the air in Level 4 – towards a waiting Steelie.



» Scared of heights? You'd best stop before the start of Level 4, then.



» Hammer time! Dah dah dah dah – dah daaaah! Break it down!

and simultaneously drop out of the top spot in week seven. Most cabinets were then retrofitted to play other games."

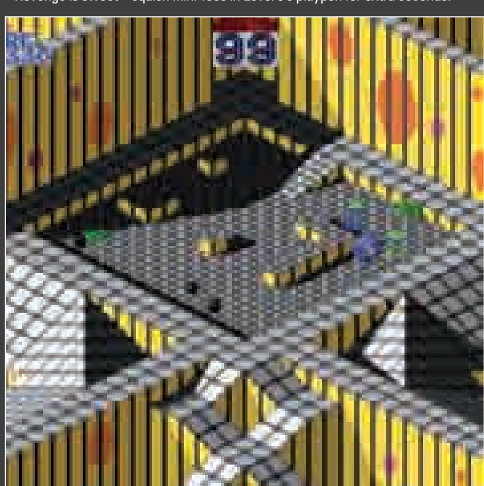
It's this one aspect Mark would address, given the chance to go back: "In retrospect, I wish the game could have been longer. Once the core technology was in place, such as the marble physics and the ray-tracer, it didn't take much time to make a level." Unfortunately, more levels would have required a time extension and an increase in board costs, due to further playfields requiring larger ROMs. "It might have been possible to increase the board cost, but the time extension would have been a non-starter, even if I'd had the confidence and foresight to ask," reckons Mark. "Atari Games was in severe financial trouble, and if *Marble Madness* hadn't shipped on schedule, the factory would have been completely idle."

Despite the slight nature of the game, *Marble Madness* nonetheless struck a chord with gamers, due to its mix of precision gameplay, devious level design and beautiful aesthetics. Its immediacy and brevity still make it an ideal pick-up-and-play title, and this combination of factors no doubt led to the many home conversions. It also nearly led to a sequel in the Nineties: the little-known *Marble Man*. "That project was spearheaded by Bob Flanagan, but the game didn't have the same minimalist aesthetic," says Mark. "In place of acid pools and the like, it had enemies such as a knife and fork – and a giant tomato! Also, Bob used joysticks to save money, but this type of game doesn't work well without a trackball – the gameplay really isn't the same."

Mark had no input into the cancelled sequel, because he'd long since left Atari Games. "Making coin-ops was brutal," he reasons. "You had to pretty much finish a game to see how much income it could earn, and only one in three games earned enough to be manufactured – the other two were tossed out." Instead, Mark headed to Sega, making games for home consoles, the technology for which now satisfied his desires. "I can't say I've really looked back – I'm still consulting in the industry and making games for consoles," he says. "You work hard, the game goes on sale, and you take your lumps. Reviews and sales might be good or bad, but someone sees the result of your work, and that's a great feeling – maybe the best in the world!"

"I loved the idea of a playfield's contours influencing the ball's path, and I spent evenings working on various approaches with Atari's art system, before settling on using an isometric grid"

» Revenge is sweet – squish mini-foes in Level 5's playpen for extra seconds.



» If you get this far, don't screw up, unless you're cheating (like we are).

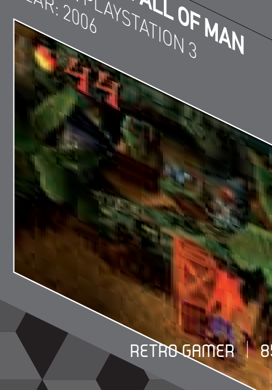


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CRASH BANDICOOT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1996

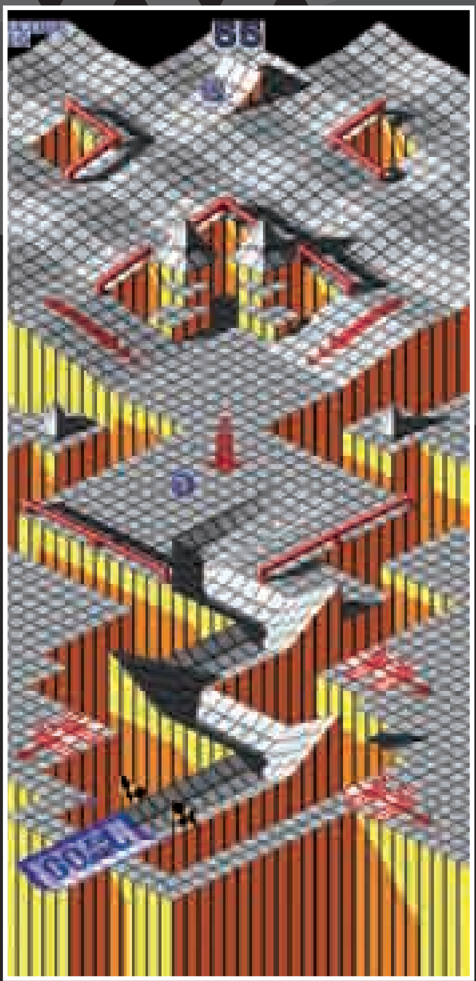
JAK AND DAXTER
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2
YEAR: 2001

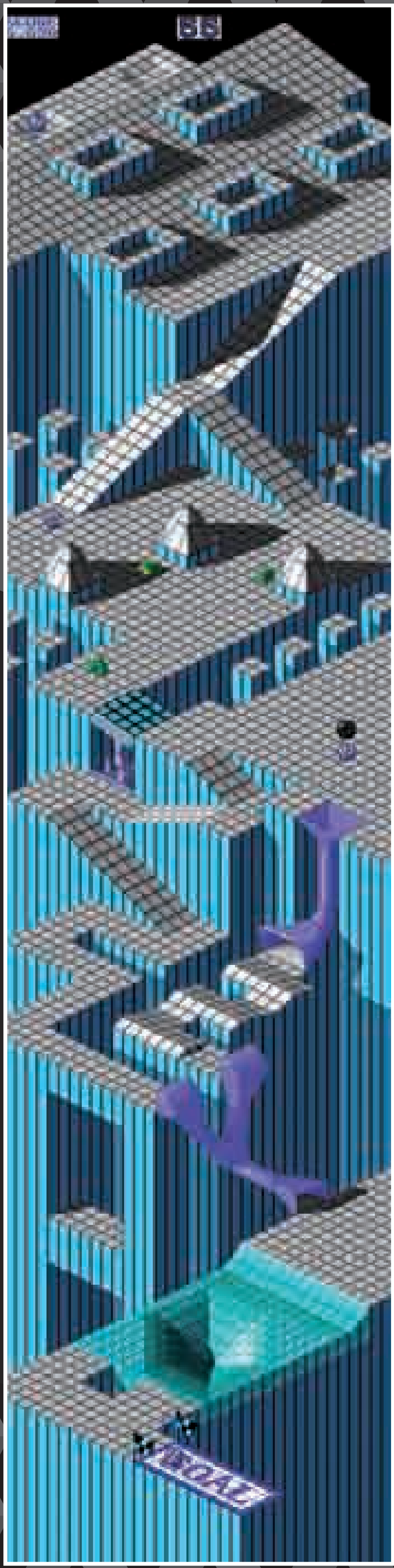
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 3
YEAR: 2006



ON THE LEVEL

Mark Cerny takes us through each level of his game, explaining his thinking behind various obstacles and adversaries, unearthing a few little-known secrets, and reflecting on how well the game works.







Practice

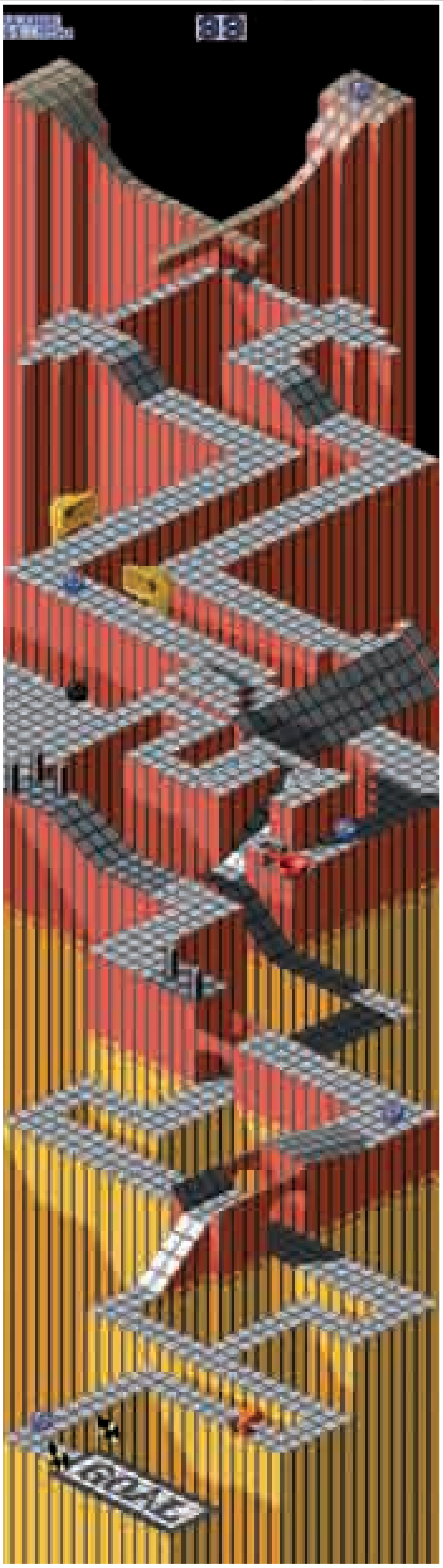
"The practice level was intended to be a short introduction to the controls and concept of the game," says Mark. "But since you have to traverse it every time you play, it was suggested that there be a secret or a challenge of some sort. I added two spots where you can jump a gap and get some points, but I have to say the replay value isn't high!" That said, success on this level can make or break a game – if you're too slow here, you'll run out of time later.

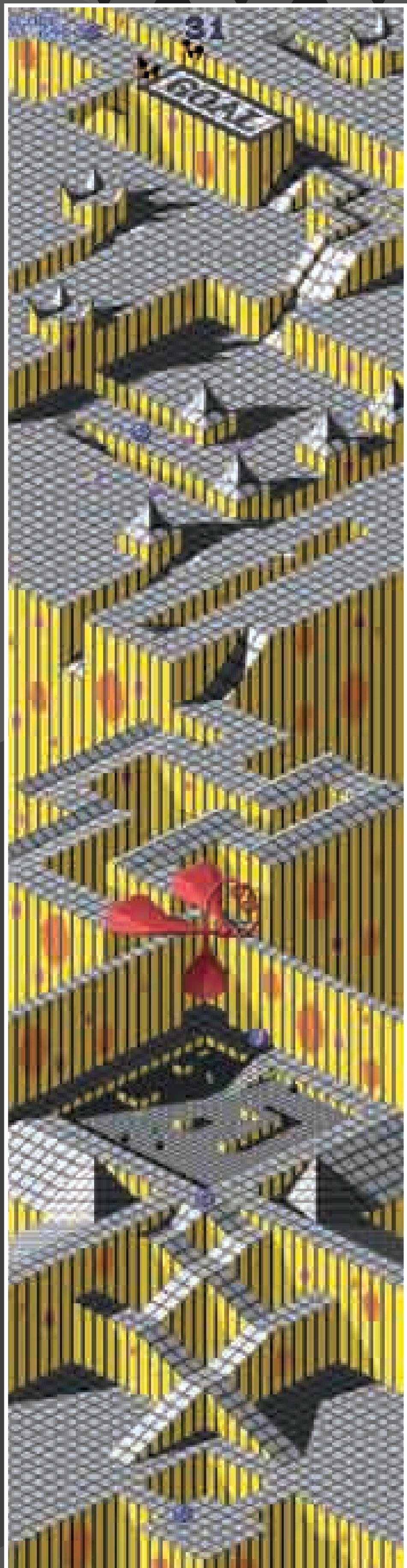
Beginner

The second level has the game's first enemies – green marble munchers and your nemesis: Black Steelie, an aggressive black marble, whose sole purpose is to knock you for six. The landscape is also harder to traverse, including narrow pathways, pipes and a huge ice patch. "The ice patch geometry was hard to craft," says Mark. "I was thinking it should have a 'black hole dimpling the fabric of spacetime' kind of look, but the graphics wouldn't come together and the marble motion was basically random with that much curvature. What you see here is the fourth try."

Intermediate

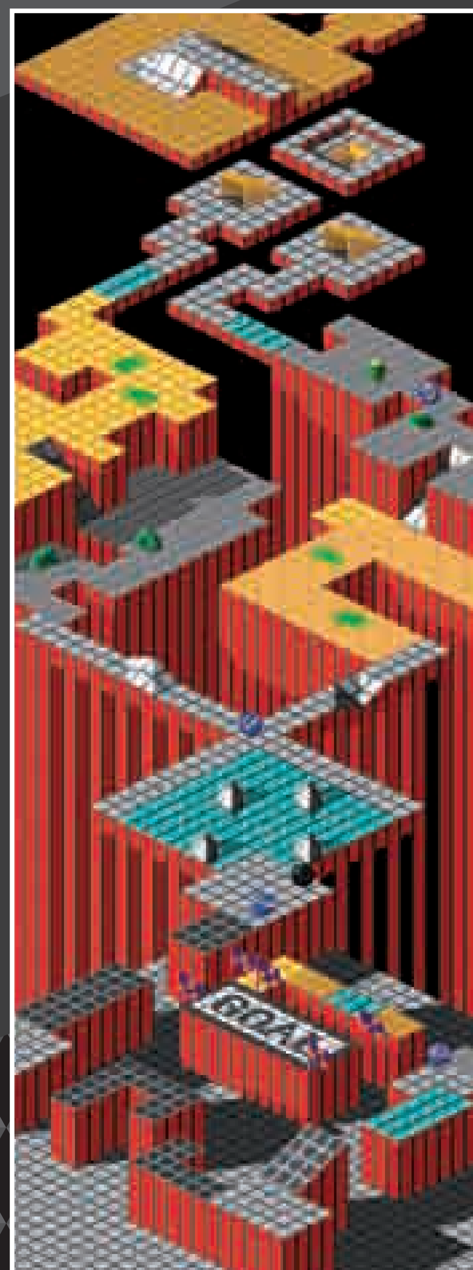
Level 3 adds deadly acid and a wave obstacle. "That's my animation – I was trying to sharpen my art skills," says Mark. "It's not as polished as the other enemies – the ones the professional did – but I don't think many players noticed." This level also has unintended shortcuts: "You can avoid the narrow channels at the beginning by jumping off the start platform."





Silly
Polka-dot patterns and surreal elements greet players that make it this far. "I thought: how can all the rules be broken? And, thus, the 'silly' level was born," says Mark. Reversed gravity makes things tough, and psychotic purple birds are hard to avoid, but there is a silver lining, as Mark explains: "There's a playpen of sorts a third of the way up the level, where you can chase miniature versions of the game's enemies – and you get a time bonus for each one you smush!"

Ultimate
"The final level had to be nearly impossible. We knew that some would finish it and try to improve their time, but most would stop playing, so this level was as hard as we could make it," says Mark. "It also has different surfaces: frictional ones to slow you down, corrugated ones that impede motion in a certain direction, and a glowing one that accelerates you."



Aerial
"Overall, this level is nice, but perhaps there's a bit too much random death," says Mark of what's possibly the game's most maddening level. "You can't really time the catapult launch to avoid the Steelie, and so sometimes even the best players die here. Also, the rods and hammers are completely random." Of course, there's also another obstacle to deal with before meeting those adversaries – vacuum cleaners that suck in unwary marbles. "At the time, I worried they didn't fit the rest of the game, but looking back, they seem just fine," considers Mark.

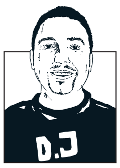
Many thanks to Bernhard Kirsch (bodenstaendig.de/marble/) for supplying the *Marble Madness* level maps, and Dan Hower (arcadeflyers.com) for the flyer scans.

SORCERY+

SEE, AMSOFT CAN MAKE GOOD GAMES



- » **PUBLISHER:** AMSOFT/VIRGIN
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

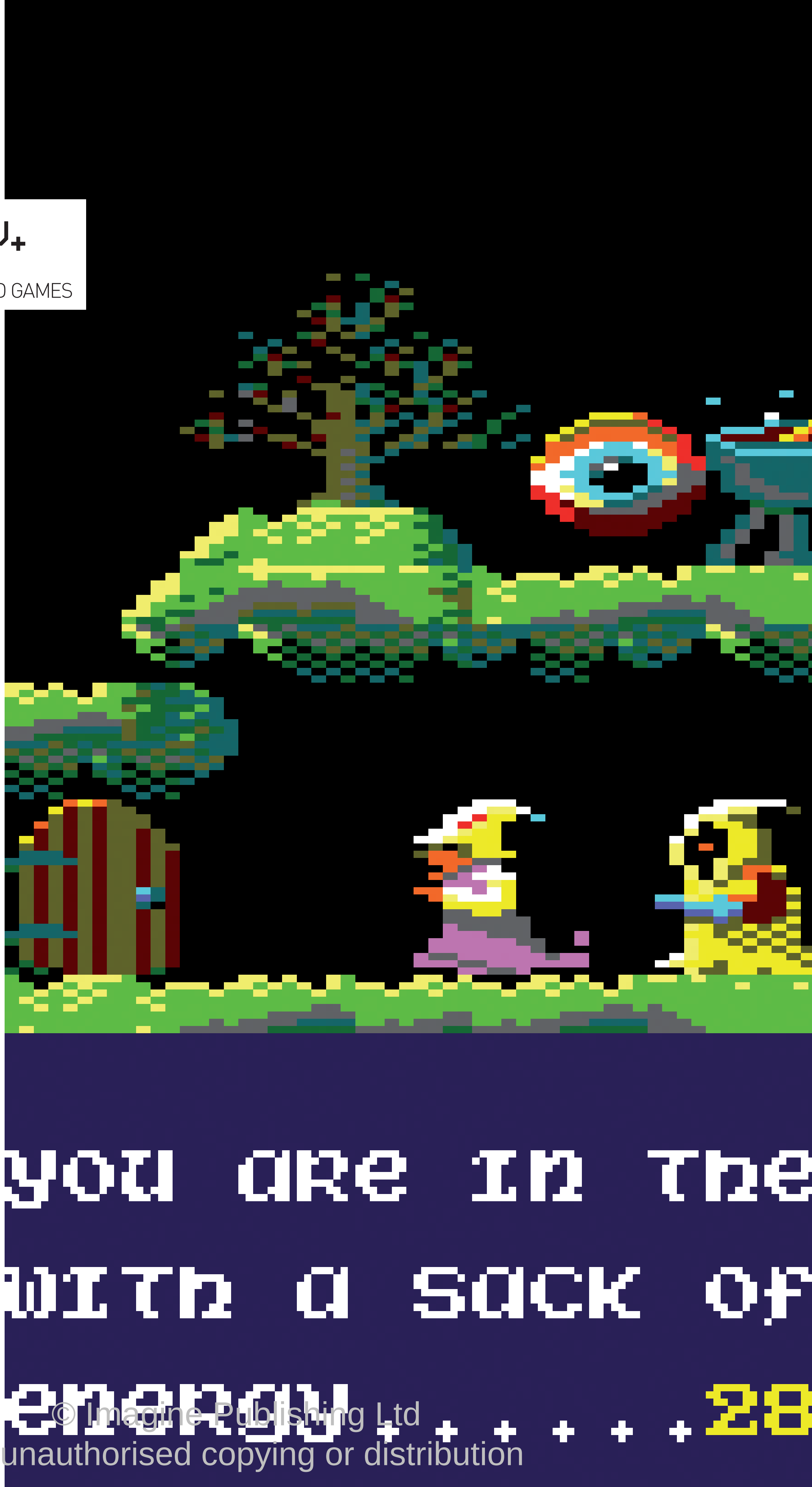
Now here's a pleasant surprise. Regular forum members will be aware that Sir Alan Sugar's Amstrad CPC systems get something of a battering on our message boards, with many members ridiculing it. Sure, a lot of it's tongue-in-cheek banter, but if you're Amstrad fans (like Stuart and myself) then their bitter words can still cut like a knife.

Here then is undeniable proof that when quick and easy Spectrum ports weren't strangling Sir Alan's machine, it was perfectly capable of turning out astounding games. Step forward *Sorcery+*, easily the greatest arcade adventure to appear on the unfairly maligned computer.

For starters, it looks glorious, with smooth, fast-moving sprites that are beautifully animated and absolutely huge. The same care and attention has also been given to *Sorcery+*'s environments, which are bristling with the sort of vibrancy and detail you just didn't see in many CPC titles. So the next time a C64 or ZX Spectrum owner mocks your computer allegiance, grab them by the scruff of the neck, show them *Sorcery+*, then watch them eat humble pie.

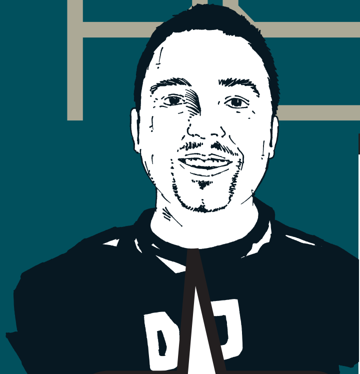
For all its stunning visuals – and *Sorcery+* truly is a sight to behold – it's the excellent gameplay that proves to be the game's trump card. Charged with rescuing several trapped sorcerers (and later, four golden hearts) you're required to move around the well-designed screens and experiment with the many items that can be found within them. Some, like the key, will enable you to enter locked areas, while the shooting star is a powerful spell that destroys any enemies that are unlucky enough to get hit by it. While brushing against *Sorcery+*'s many enemies will result in the loss of energy, it can be replaced by sitting over one of the many bubbling cauldrons that are scattered judiciously throughout the game map.

It's rare when we get to champion an Amstrad title that's genuinely superior to any other available title on a rival computer and it's even rarer for it to be one under the Amsoft banner. Play it now and be prepared to retract all those previous forum posts.




woods,
spells,
SCORE:003250

RETRORATED



This month's round-up features one of Nintendo's first WiiWare releases; namely, the excellent Star Soldier R. With the recent announcements of Mega Man 9 from Capcom and Hudson's Alien Crush 2 expect the new service to become an essential resource for the revival of old classic franchises.





STAR SOLDIER R



» Shooting enemies as quickly as possibly will rapidly raise your combo multiplier and earn you huge scores.

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** WiiWARE
- **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- **60 HERTZ:** YES

If there's one thing Nintendo's new WiiWare service proves, it's that the console is desperately in need of an external hard drive (or failing that, the option to play games directly from an SD card). We've only downloaded a couple of titles from the new service and it's not due to them being poor, it's simply down to the fact that we've no space left on our Wii. Storage space shouldn't be an issue in this day and age, so it's going to be interesting to see if Nintendo changes its stance in the future.

If you have space on your Wii though, make sure this excellent blaster is the first game you download, as it's currently our favourite title on the service. *Star Soldier R* is an honest to goodness score attack game – nothing more, nothing less. Rather than going with convention and delivering a title with progressive levels (as it had done with *Star Soldier* on the GameCube and PSP) *Star Soldier R* simply retains the two and five-minute caravan modes.

This is a huge gamble on the part of Hudson, as casual gamers are going to have a very hard time paying 800 points (around £6) for a game that has seemingly so little appeal. They'll be missing out though, as these modes have always been the bread and butter of the series and by cutting the fat – so to speak – and utilising an (fairly decent) online scoreboard it's created the addictive qualities of all those naughty drugs your parents always told you not to take.

Visuals are intricately detailed, enemies attack you at an incredibly fast pace, while your ears are assaulted by a rocking track that sets the mood perfectly. Add in beautifully crafted score mechanics and a couple of rock-hard bosses and *Star Soldier* is one of the purest and most addictive shooters we've played for some time.

Yes, it's annoying that there's no quick and easy way of viewing your friends scores (although Hudson has created a handy online leaderboard at http://hudson-wiiware.com/starsoldier/eur/e/ranking/ranking_w2_01.html) and many will still feel cheated that there are only two levels (in five-minute mode only) available, but as a pure shoot-'em-up this is currently unbeatable on Nintendo's online service. Let's hope Hudson shows the same care and attention to the incoming *Alien Crash 2*.



THE SCORES

Presentation 74%
Impossibly slick, although many will wonder why such a limited score attack board has been used.

Aesthetics 88%
Beautifully stylised models that perfectly capture the spirit of earlier games in the franchise. Rocking soundtrack, too.

Playability 96%
It's insanely easy to pick up, but there's so much to discover you'll be unable to put it down.

Longevity 85%
If you're a score chaser, then *Star Soldier R* will keep you going for ages. Anyone else will be disappointed by its five-minute run time.

Value for Money 88%
Around six quid for an adrenaline rush that's perfectly legal? Sign us up. Like now.

Overall 89%



» *Metal Slug* still manages to look absolutely amazing, despite the fact that it's now 12 years old.



» Who would have thought that you could actually make a tank look cute? The Metal Slug goes on the rampage.

METAL SLUG

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- **PRICE:** 900 POINTS
- **60 HERTZ:** NO

Although Nazca's *Metal Slug* is already available on the Wii – in the form of the *Metal Slug Anthology* – this is still worth downloading, simply because you can now play it on the Virtual Controller.

Effectively a cartoony parody of Konami's legendary *Contra* franchise, *Metal Slug* is an utterly wonderful blaster that's lost none of its appeal over the last 12 years. The first thing that strikes you even now is just how amazing it still actually looks. Environments boast an insane amount of detail – from crumbling rock to the exploding debris of defeated bosses – while the animation throughout is simply flawless. Marco and Tarma may exude an innate amount of coolness as they blast their way through the incredibly tough stages, but it's the rebellion forces that will constantly manage to impress. Whether they're gingerly creeping under electrified barriers, furiously pumping out capsizing boats or simply sitting on the bog, their crazy antics will bring a smile to the face of the hardest of critics. Music, likewise, is of an extremely high standard, with noisy, cartoony guitar riffs that perfectly ape the on-screen actions.

Then there's the hard-as-nails, but sublime gameplay that is perfectly balanced and will constantly drag you back for one more play thanks to its varied power-ups, tough bosses and great level design. A true classic.

THE SCORES

Presentation 45%
Dull menus that give no indication of the brilliance to be found within.

Aesthetics 93%
Graphics and sound are still fantastic, boasting great detail and wonderfully animated sprites.

Playability 93%
Incredibly easy to pick up and play but virtually impossible to put down.

Longevity 88%
There aren't many levels on offer but its toughness is such that you won't be completing it any time soon.

Value for Money 80%
It's a lot of money when you consider the price of the *Metal Slug Anthology.*

Overall 86%

WARLORDS

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- **PRICE:** 400 POINTS
- **60 HERTZ:** YES

Considering how badly it messed up *Missile Command* and *Centipede* on Xbox Live Arcade, it's fair to say that we didn't have much hope for *Warlords*. Luckily, Stainless Games has shown a great deal of restraint and has delivered a remake that does the original (also included) a surprising amount of justice.

While we can live without the naff Xbox Live Vision Support, the ability to play *Warlords* online is a very good thing indeed and gives the classic multiplayer game a fresh new injection of life. Connections are surprisingly stable, there's your usual online leaderboards and we don't even mind the futuristic-looking graphics. Visuals were never *Warlords*' strong point though, as it was the gameplay that always managed to impress. Fortunately, the frenetic action of old – use an *Arkanoid*-like paddle to deflect fireballs away from your castle – remains as exciting as ever.

Although the Xbox 360's D-Pad and analogue sticks are no match for the original arcade machine's spinner, the controls are still pretty manageable and you will rarely feel cheated when you miss a fireball. You will, however, begin to develop an incredibly evil streak that will see you taking great pleasure in ruining the castles of your opponents before they can do the same to yours. Just don't blame us when people start deleting themselves from your friends list. You can always find more.



» It wouldn't be a Stainless Games game without lots of pretty, pointless particle effects. God bless you guys.



THE SCORES

Presentation 50%
Extremely straightforward, but it does the job.

Aesthetics 65%
The old version looks incredibly simplistic nowadays, while the new version is still too gaudy for its own good.

Playability 95%
Join three other players and you'll discover one of the best multiplayer games online.

Longevity 65%
Unless you're playing the multiplayer mode, there's very little here to keep the single player entertained.

Value for Money 90%
Two versions of a classic multiplayer game for a paltry 400 points sounds like a bargain to us.

Overall 74%





RAYMAN

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
- **PRICE:** £3.49
- **60 HERTZ:** YES

Although new gamers will associate Michael Ancel's creation with mini-games and crazy rabbits, the limbless hero originally started out as just another platformer – albeit one with very pretty graphics.

Indeed, even today *Rayman* proves to be an incredibly gorgeous looking game, with a vivid colour palette, beautifully drawn environments and Disney-quality character design that instantly made it stand out against other early PlayStation releases.

Sadly, while you'll still marvel at *Rayman*'s gaudy aesthetics you'll instantly be brought down to Earth with a harsh bump once you actually start playing it. For you see, scratch underneath those lovely visuals and you'll discover *Rayman* to be an extremely bland and dull platformer that's as generic as they come and harder than a beered-up football hooligan.

Sure there are some really nice touches to be found within – we're still huge fans of *Rayman*'s flying/shoot-'em-up sections and there's a series of well-hidden items to be found, but it's all executed with such flatness and the margin for error is so strict (some levels require ridiculous leaps of faith) that all of the promised fun just gets sucked out of it. If *Rayman*'s gameplay was even half as good as its insanely purty visuals are, then this would certainly have been £3.49 well spent. As it is, *Rayman* is just a classic example of a game that you may have once loved not really standing the harsh test of time.



THE SCORES

Presentation 60%
Cute, simple and very straightforward.

Aesthetics 95%
Rayman himself remains utterly charming and the bright, colourful levels have lost none of their impact.

Playability 55%
Has fiddly controls, flabby level design and an insane difficulty level that prove that *Rayman*'s beauty is only skin deep.

Longevity 68%
There's certainly a big game here and it's going to take ages to fully complete it, but will you really want to?

Value for Money 70%
£3.50 is an amazing price for a PlayStation game, but there are better

Overall 60%

MR DRILLER ONLINE

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- **PRICE:** 900 POINTS
- **60 HERTZ:** YES

Talk about getting egg on your face. When Namco first launched *Mr Driller Online* it lost a huge amount of credibility due to the fact it was impossible to play online. Now the problem's finally been fixed – it's still not perfect, but then what online game is? – the time has come to see if *Mr Driller Online* finally lives up to all the original hype. The answer is a resounding yes.

Supporting both a versus mode that simply has two players facing off against each other, or a slightly more complex tag-team offering *Mr Driller Online* proves itself to be brilliant fun, even if it did take Namco nearly two months to sort all its issues out.

Despite being touted as an online game, this version of *Mr Driller* still has plenty of options for when you fancy playing on your own. Arcade mode is virtually the same as the *Mr Driller* that first arrived in Japanese arcades in 2000, while the Challenge mode gives you a variety of tasks to complete, many of which are very hard to finish.

Add in some vibrant, cute graphics and some jaunty tunes and *Mr Driller Online* is an important addition to your Live Arcade library. Let's hope early adopters haven't been put off the game for good.



» A few months ago it would have been impossible to play this online mode. Thank goodness it only took Namco a couple of months to fix.

THE SCORES

Presentation 80%
It's bright and breezy and offers you plenty of options to choose from.

Aesthetics 75%
Basic to look at, but the hi-res display does make everything nice and easy to see (even if it's a little fuzzy).

Playability 91%
Mr Driller has always been a superb puzzler, and the new online modes add a great new element to the gameplay.

Longevity 85%
Once you're bored of the multiplayer mode (unlikely), you'll find a huge Challenge mode to wade through.

Value for Money 85%
Considering that the Dreamcast version will often cost around a tenner, this is something of a bargain.

Overall 79%

REVIEW

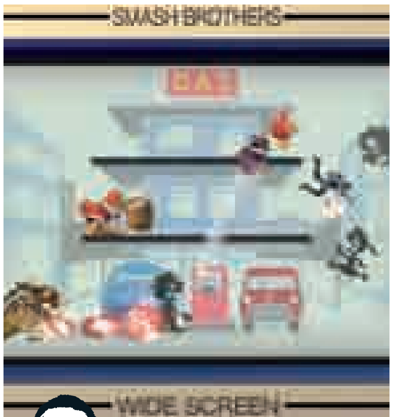
SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

retro GAMER SIZZLER

NINTENDO TAKES FAN SERVICE TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

INFORMATION

- » **SYSTEM:** Wii
- » **PRICE:** £34.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4





»Sega's blue mascot is a great addition to the *Smash Bros* crew and boasts some excellent attacks and moves.



We were expecting great things from Nintendo's brawler, and now it's here – three months after its US debut – this excellent sequel doesn't disappoint. Indeed, what impresses the most about *Brawl* is just how complete it feels. Hidden characters, stages, music and trophies constantly seem to appear at the end of each match, while the developers have created a staggering array of gameplay modes to choose from.

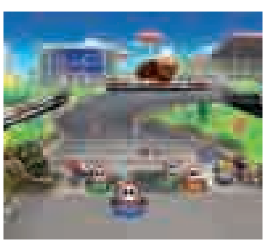
As well as standard brawl matches between four players, there's a huge amount of customisation on offer, letting you change almost every aspect of the game, ensuring that no two matches are the same. Changing the characters' sizes, and altering speed and gravity are a few of the options available, with bouts only limited by your imagination. Add in an online mode, a total of 35 characters and the option to play with a variety of control methods and *Brawl* is easily the most comprehensive Wii game we've seen.

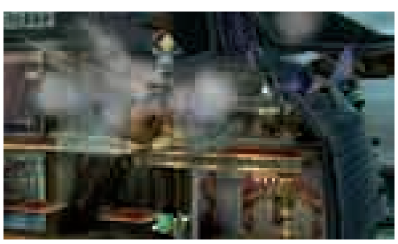
Of course, all these options and different gameplay modes would be completely pointless if *Brawl* wasn't backed up by a decent fighting system, but Sora has once again come up trumps and has delivered a gameplay experience that supersedes the GameCube's excellent *Melee*. As always, this latest version of *Smash Bros* appears to be deceptively simple, with little more than the option to attack, jump, use a special or raise a shield. As your experience grows, however, you'll find *Brawl* to be amazingly satisfying with a level of depth that belies its cheerful bright exterior. While it doesn't boast *Virtua Fighter* levels of dedication, it's still going to take a while to master the 35 available characters, meaning that *Brawl* boasts a ridiculous amount of longevity. Best of all, newcomers like *Metal Gear*'s Snake, Sonic the Hedgehog and Wario feel like they've been in the series from the very beginning, while the new Final Smash attacks add a huge amount of strategy to *Brawl*'s onion-like gameplay.

In fact, if it wasn't for the overlong and pointless single-player mode that has been clumsily tacked on, *Brawl* could be the perfect game. No other recent title has been put together with the same love and attention, or has such an appreciation for where it's come from; and most importantly, allows Sonic, Mario, Snake and Pikachu to kick seven shades of hell out of each other. If that's not worth the price of admission, then nothing is.

»Some of the levels in *Brawl* look truly glorious. Who says you need hi-def visuals to create stunning looking games?









OPINION

As a massive Nintendo fan, I'm obviously going to love *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, what with all the fan service and everything. But I'm also incredibly fond of the gameplay, too. Most fighting games can be pretty alienating unless you're one of these people who dedicates their life to learning all of their subtleties. So it's great to play something like *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, which is very easy to pick up with just the right amount of hidden depth. It's almost like a next-gen *IK+*.

Ashley Day

THE SCORES

Presentation 98%
Well presented with many options, *Brawl* appears to have something for everyone.

Aesthetics 97%
With its lovely animations and superb score, *Brawl* outclasses everything else on the Wii.

Playability 97%
Like the best fighters, *Brawl* is accessible to everyone, but has incredible depth.

Longevity 98%
With 35 characters, online play and loads to unlock, you'll never get bored.

Value for Money 96%
The only thing that surprises us with *Brawl* is that it doesn't come with a kitchen sink.

Overall 98%

RETRORATED

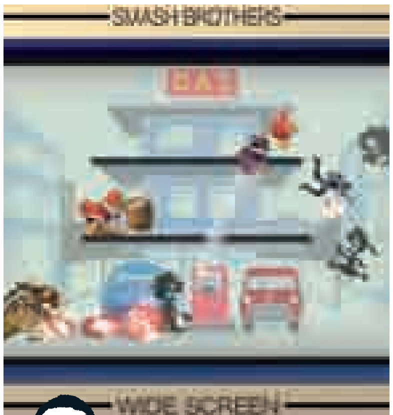
REVIEW

SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

NINTENDO TAKES FAN SERVICE TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** Wii
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4





We were expecting great things from Nintendo's brawler, and now it's here – three months after its US debut – this excellent sequel doesn't disappoint. Indeed, what impresses the most about *Brawl* is just how complete it feels. Hidden characters, stages, music and trophies constantly seem to appear at the end of each match, while the developers have created a staggering array of gameplay modes to choose from.

As well as standard brawl matches between four players, there's a huge amount of customisation on offer, letting you change almost every aspect of the game, ensuring that no two matches are the same. Changing the characters' sizes, and altering speed and gravity are a few of the options available, with bouts only limited by your imagination. Add in an online mode, a total of 35 characters and the option to play with a variety of control methods and *Brawl* is easily the most comprehensive Wii game we've seen.

Of course, all these options and different gameplay modes would be completely pointless if *Brawl* wasn't backed up by a decent fighting system, but Sora has once again come up trumps and has delivered a gameplay experience that supersedes the GameCube's excellent *Melee*. As always, this latest version of *Smash Bros* appears to be deceptively simple, with little more than the option to attack, jump, use a special or raise a shield. As your experience grows, however, you'll find *Brawl* to be amazingly satisfying with a level of depth that belies its cheerful bright exterior. While it doesn't boast *Virtua Fighter* levels of dedication, it's still going to take a while to master the 35 available characters, meaning that *Brawl* boasts a ridiculous amount of longevity. Best of all, newcomers like *Metal Gear*'s Snake, Sonic the Hedgehog and Wario feel like they've been in the series from the very beginning, while the new Final Smash attacks add a huge amount of strategy to *Brawl*'s onion-like gameplay.

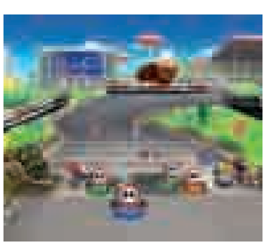
In fact, if it wasn't for the overlong and pointless single-player mode that has been clumsily tacked on, *Brawl* could be the perfect game. No other recent title has been put together with the same love and attention, or has such an appreciation for where it's come from; and most importantly, allows Sonic, Mario, Snake and Pikachu to kick seven shades of hell out of each other. If that's not worth the price of admission, then nothing is.

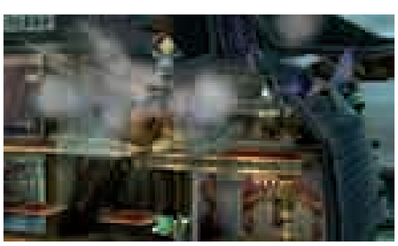


» Sega's blue mascot is a great addition to the *Smash Bros* crew and boasts some excellent attacks and moves.



» Some of the levels in *Brawl* look truly glorious. Who says you need hi-def visuals to create stunning looking games?







OPINION

As a massive Nintendo fan, I'm obviously going to love *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, what with all the fan service and everything. But I'm also incredibly fond of the gameplay, too. Most fighting games can be pretty alienating unless you're one of these people who dedicates their life to learning all of their subtleties. So it's great to play something like *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, which is very easy to pick up with just the right amount of hidden depth. It's almost like a next-gen *IK+*.

Ashley Day

THE SCORES

Presentation 98%
Well presented with many options, *Brawl* appears to have something for everyone.

Aesthetics 97%
With its lovely animations and superb score, *Brawl* outclasses everything else on the Wii.

Playability 97%
Like the best fighters, *Brawl* is accessible to everyone, but has incredible depth.

Longevity 98%
With 35 characters, online play and loads to unlock, you'll never get bored.

Value for Money 96%
The only thing that surprises us with *Brawl* is that it doesn't come with a kitchen sink.

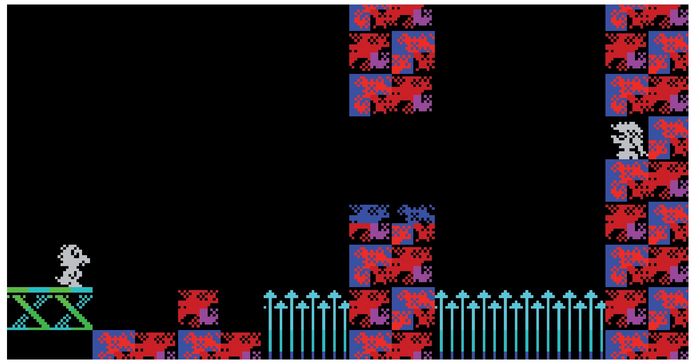
Overall 98%

HOMEBREW RATED

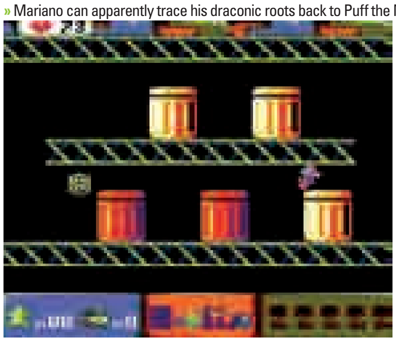
MARIANO ISN'T QUITE A MAGIC DRAGON, BUT HE'S AVAILABLE ON BOTH THE SPECTRUM AND CPC



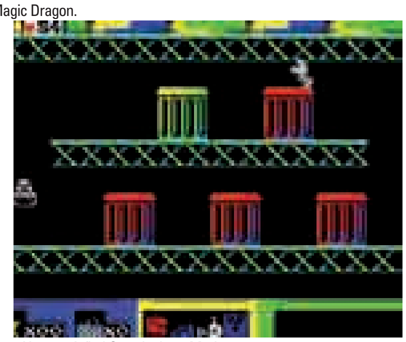
» Mariano can apparently trace his draconic roots back to Puff the Magic Dragon.



» The Speccy version is well worth a download, although we do prefer the Amstrad effort.



» Bin there, done that!



» You won't find Osca in there Mariano.



» Mariano's Spectrum outing features a far larger playing field for the cute dragon to traverse.

MARIANO THE DRAGON - CAPERS IN CITYLAND

IT ISN'T EASY BEING PINK…



FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC AND SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: COMPUTER EMUZONE GAMES STUDIO
LINK: CEZGS.COMPUTEREMUZONE.COM/?L=EN
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

You spend ages waiting for games starring cute dragons and then two turn up at once – or more accurately, the same game appears on two machines. *Mariano The Dragon – Capers In Cityland* is a cutesy platformer that, in a rare step for an indie title, was released on both the Spectrum and CPC. The story revolves around Mariano's five friends who have been locked up by local despot Pachin Poi Poi in the dungeons of Cityland, each for failing to complete a task they had been assigned. Mariano, not liking to see his friends imprisoned for crimes they didn't commit, heads off to help them escape by completing the five tasks, earning keys from Pachin that are required to free his friends.

The tasks range from finding a tin of red paint to stomping some local wildlife in magical boots; all five must be completed to gain the keys for the cells, and can be attempted in any order or simultaneously. The complex is large too, sprawling over 100 screens and packed with colour and detail; every room apart from the first one is populated by an attacker, while some of the areas on the upper level have two. Touching a nasty causes you to lose health points, usually just the one per collision because most attackers disappear once touched, but some are hardier and will continue to drain energy while contact is made.

Jumping is handled in an unusual way; Mariano moves upwards and then downwards at a fixed speed but doesn't stop moving up if a platform gets in the way, instead he pushes against it and, if moved away from the obstruction, will continue to rise! Despite being based on the same story and map, there are differences that make each a unique experience to play. The CPC is the smoother version and makes the quirky jumping easier to follow, but it suffers from an annoying nasty-spawning system; the Speccy has fixed enemy starting points for each screen but the CPC places attackers randomly and only checks they're not stuck in the landscape, so the odds are good that Mariano will walk straight into a nasty when entering a screen with no time to react.

It comes down to which is nicer to play, the chunkier movement of the Speccy with its better nasty placement or the smoother but less fair CPC version; despite the higher difficulty, the CPC is the better of the two, its much easier on the eyes during prolonged games and supports joystick control.

CPC SCORES

PRESENTATION: 70% Nice loading and title pictures, and you can redefine the keys.
AESTHETICS: 79% Good graphics but the sound is rather simple.
PLAYABILITY: 79% Sometimes very frustrating but easy enough to get into.
LONGEVITY: 74% Can be a little frustrating after time, but there's a lot to be explored.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 78%

SPECTRUM SCORES

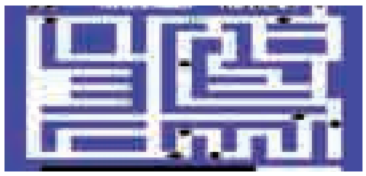
PRESENTATION: 67% A good selection of options to create a game.
AESTHETICS: 76% Surprisngly solid, but not quite as nice as the CPC visuals.
PLAYABILITY: 76% The menus and editors are functional.
LONGEVITY: 69% Again, a large play area to wander around.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 74%

GO HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH THE UNITED STATES' NEW DEFENCE FORCE, AND ENJOY A CHALLENGING HORIZONTAL BLAST THROUGH SPACE

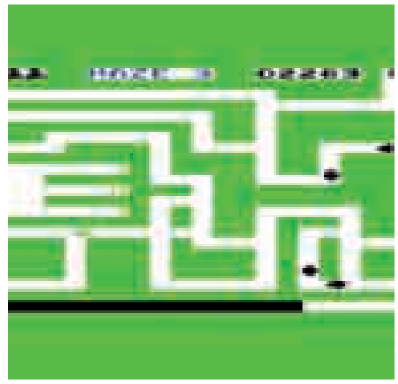
RETURN TO FORT KNOX

GOLD RESERVES ARE ALL STAFFED BY MUTANT RATS?

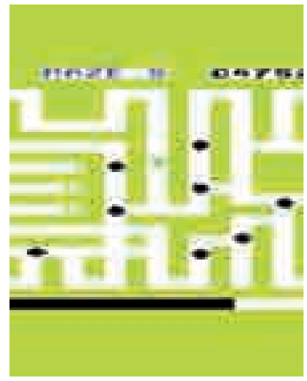




» Yeeeah, 'ello rat fans!

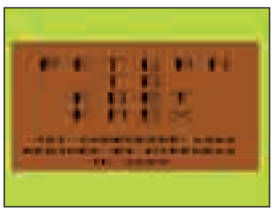


» You've got the power to know you're indestructible.



» See the face you love light up…

FORMAT: EXPANDED VIC-20
DEVELOPED BY: NINO PORCINO
LINK: XOOMER.ALICE.IT/APORCINO/VIC20
RELEASE DATE: MAY 2008
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



Fort Knox, a concrete and steel fortress brimming with treasures ripe for the picking for a good bank robber, but, because the US government doesn't usually leave gold lying about unguarded, they've released what appear to be giant rats into the corridors. The player's objective is to navigate the vaults, avoiding the rats and collecting gold bars one at a time before returning them to the exit; picking up a gold bar sets a timer in motion that, if it expires, causes the nasties to speed up until the loot is added to the haul or the player is caught.

Luckily these rats aren't bright and don't chase intruders, instead they roam around and it's up to the player to avoid being cornered and strip searched for cheese.

Return To Fort Knox is a sequel and in this case a fan-developed one based on Commodore's 1982 cartridge release *Raid On Fort Knox*. *Return* builds on that base, adding enhancements, such as an increased number of rats on duty, giving the player a freeze ray to stop roaming rodents in their tracks and eight redesigned vault layouts. When attempting to enhance an existing title it can be hard to maintain the playability, but *Return To Fort Knox* does almost everything right, improving on a solid game; it's simple to get into, harder to master and well worth putting some time into.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 82% Difficulty settings and a set of instructions in the title sequence.
AESTHETICS: 67% Simple but functional and smooth graphics with reasonable sound.
PLAYABILITY: 82% Difficult from the outset, but not unfair.
LONGEVITY: 77% Eight vaults to learn, so there's a reasonable challenge there.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 80%

SIRIUS

DEALING DEATH AMONG THE STARS SINCE 1990



FORMAT: ATARI 7800
DEVELOPED BY: KEVIN FRANKLIN, TYNESOFT
LINK: WWW.ATARIPROTOS.COM
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 2008
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Atari's 7800 ProSystem isn't renowned for its large library of horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-ups, in fact a conversion of *Choplifter!* is really the only notable title in that genre. That deficiency was almost rectified by *Sirius*, a horizontal blaster made by the same programmer who wrote *Zybex* for the C64 that, for some reason, was canned by Tynesoft when very close to completion.

As with all good shooters, the plot is irrelevant because the objective is to blow several shades out of anything that gets in your way, something that happens pretty often because the four worlds that the player must traverse are heavily populated by gun turrets and spaceships whose sole mission is to either shoot or, failing that, ram the player. Luckily, the ship starts out quite well armed and there are power-ups around that improve those capabilities.

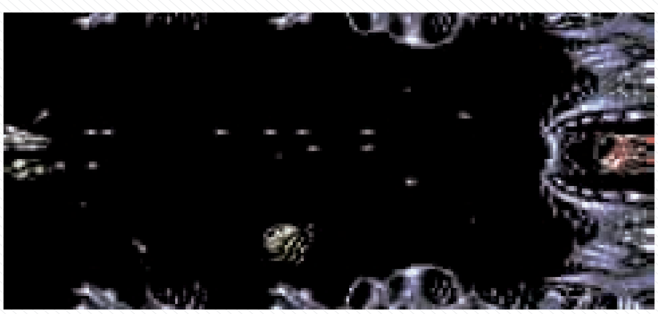
Although it's close to completion, *Sirius* isn't finished and there are a few places where that's fairly obvious; sound is simple and somewhat irritating, bullets can get stuck on screen and the difficulty curve is steep even when on easy, as well as feeling a little inconsistent as though the balancing wasn't finished. But for those who like challenging games and can live with a few hiccups, Sirius is enjoyable and it's a shame it wasn't released when a lot more 7800 users could have appreciated it.



» When I said, "Bring me back a piece of rock"…



» Laser security system overkill.



» Probably the coolest-looking 8-bit boss seen so far in 2008.

THE SCORES

PRESENTATION: 75% Good presentation screens and easy or hard difficulties.
AESTHETICS: 85% Nice graphics but no music and the sounds soon grate.
PLAYABILITY: 91% Simple to get into, but tough even for experienced players.
LONGEVITY: 84% It'll take a while to be good enough to see all four levels.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 87%

BARGAIN HUNT

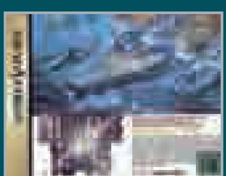
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

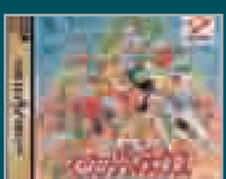
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting back on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. This month we're going to be looking at shoot-'em-ups on the Sega Saturn

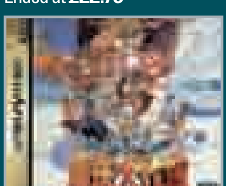
STRIKERS 1945
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£12.89**



SEXY PARODIUS
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£34.89**



KINGDOM GRAND PRIX
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£22.76**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

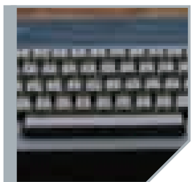
ACORN



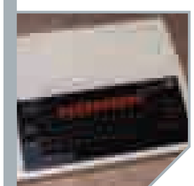
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($165+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

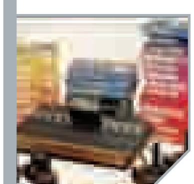


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



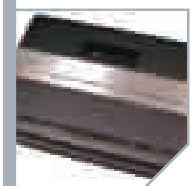
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ★★★★★ ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- ★★★★ HEN'S TEETH
- ★★★ LUCKY FIND
- ★★ EBAY REGULAR
- ★ CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN



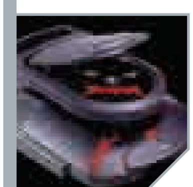
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

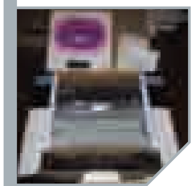


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

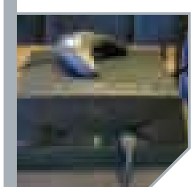
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



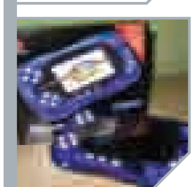
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



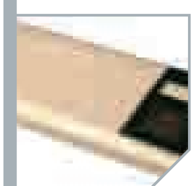
AMIGA 500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the bestselling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

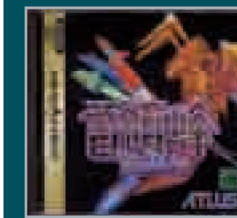


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

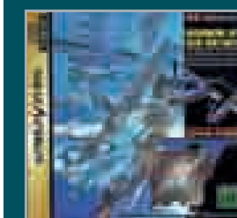


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

DONPACHI
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£14.56**



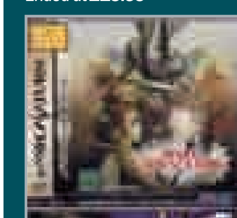
STRIKERS 1945 II
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£16.01**



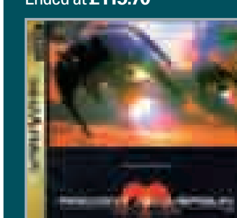
METAL BLACK
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£32.45**



SOL DIVIDE
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£28.65**



RADIANT SILVERGUN
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£95**
Ended at **£115.70**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- CLOVERFIELD: BLU-RAY
- INTO THE WILD: HD DVD
- THERE WILL BE BLOOD: BLU-RAY



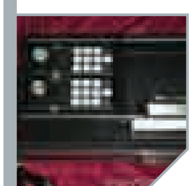
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio had hoped it would do better than its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



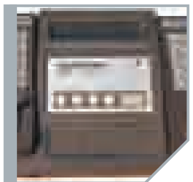
COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



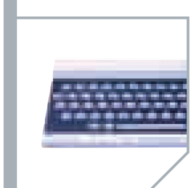
INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



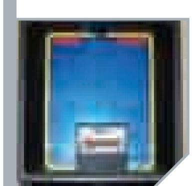
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Series of old computers by Tomy.

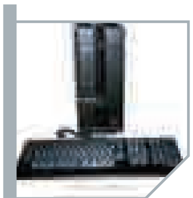


VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

SPONSORED BY FORCE 18

X68000



» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.

- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

MSX

MSX 1



» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.

- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES

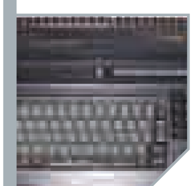
MSX 2



» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.

- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

MSX 2+



» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.

- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL

MSX TURBO R



» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.

- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC

PC-6### (ALSO MK II)



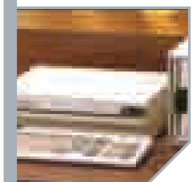
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.

PC-8801



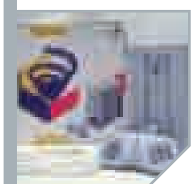
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.

PC-9801



» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.

PCFX



» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.

- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)

PC-ENGINE



» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.

PC-ENGINE GT



» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.

TURBO GRAFX-16



» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.

TURBO EXPRESS



» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.

- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN

SUPER GRAFX



» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.

- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS

PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD



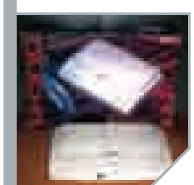
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.

PC-E DUO/TURBO DUO



» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

DUO-R



» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.

- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

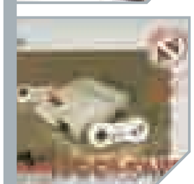
NINTENDO

FAMICOM



» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!

FAMICOM AV



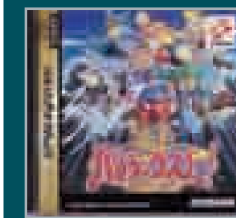
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM



» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

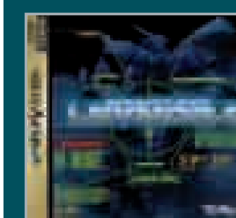
PARODIUS DELUXE
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£9.21**



SONIC WINGS SPECIAL
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£24**
Ended at **£16.39**



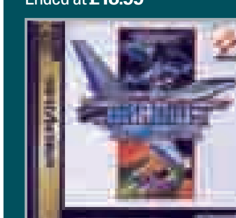
ASSAULT SUIT LEYNOS 2
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£10.01**

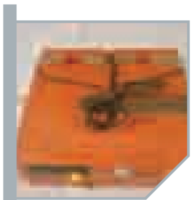


LAYER SECTION
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£7.91**



GRADIUS DELUXE
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£18.99**





SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



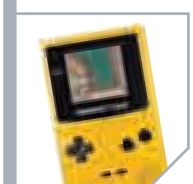
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



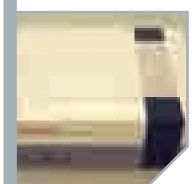
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



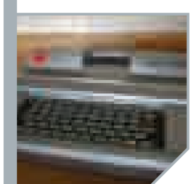
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



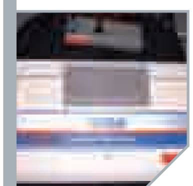
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



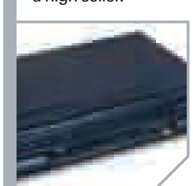
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

SPONSORED BY

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

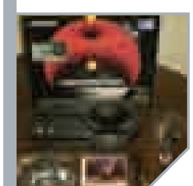


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

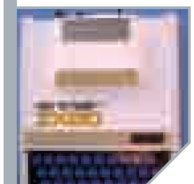
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR

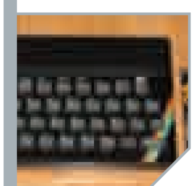


ZX80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR

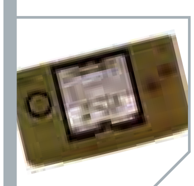


NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

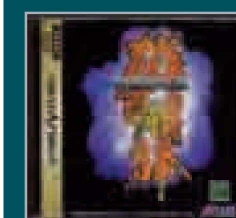
KYUKYOKO TIGER II
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£31.27**



SENGOKU BLADE
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£13.96**



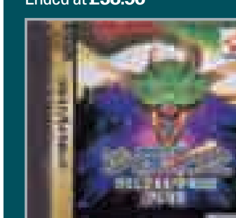
DODONPACHI
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£33.59**



BATTLE GAREGGA
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£27.25**



SALAMANDER DELUXE
System: **Saturn**
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£38.56**



GET READY!

IN AN EXCLUSIVE NEW INTERVIEW, LEGENDARY SEGA CREATOR **YU SUZUKI** TALKS TO **RETRO GAMER** ABOUT THE CREATION OF OUTRUN, ONE OF THE GREATEST ARCADE RACERS OF ALL TIME

MORE EXCITING FEATURES

» Released just two short years after the Atari 2600, Mattel's excellent Intellivision proved itself to be a more than worthy competitor. Even if it did have those funny looking controllers…

» The final part of our Konami coverage looks back at some of the company's greatest franchises, including *Gradius, Castlevania, Pro Evolution Soccer* and *Metal Gear Solid*. Don't miss it.

» *Q*bert* was one of those early arcade games that was able to mix swearing and isometric gameplay to great effect. Creator Warren Davis explains the origins of the profanity-spewing platform star.



NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 14 AUGUST 2008

LOAD 54

RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO DARREN CALVERT, CO-FOUNDER OF THE RATHER ESSENTIAL VC REVIEWS WEBSITE

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site with every machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum that caters for an Australian audience.

CPC ZONE
www.cpczone.net
Excellent site for the Amstrad range of computers with all the latest news and reviews.

C64 GAME ENDINGS
www.c64endings.co.uk/
Great site that has over 260 endings for classic and not so classic Commodore 64 games.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews and a friendly forum.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
This great Amiga website is run by Kim Lemon, owner of the excellent Lemon 64.

MAC RETRO
www.macretro.tk
Getting emulators up and running on the Mac, this is a brilliant site.

NEO-GEO.COM
www.neo-geo.com
Dedicated to SNK's systems, but with lots of other stuff to enjoy.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
Sega focused, but also dedicated to covering as many arcade games as possible.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
This site is devoted to imports, but there's a retro section with useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you thought the Atari 2600 was ancient, you may want to visit this fascinating site.



When did you set up VC Reviews?
Darren Calvert: We set up VC Reviews in November 2006 to coincide with the American launch of the Wii. We'd heard about the Virtual Console service and anticipated that it would be a huge success based on its exciting launch line-up, so we were pretty sure a website dedicated to the service would be popular.

Why did you decide to just cover the VC and not Live Arcade or Sony's PSN?
DC: I think the attraction was as hardened retro gamers ourselves, we were already so familiar with the sorts of games that come on to the Virtual Console that it felt more natural to review those games. We have, however, gone on to launch a new site dedicated to WiiWare, called WiiWare World (www.wiiware-world.com), which has proved to be incredibly popular in the short time the WiiWare service has been running.

What gives the VC Reviews website the edge over similar sites?
DC: We've seen many other Virtual Console-themed sites popping up and then fading away over the past year. I would say the main thing that gives us the edge is that we have reviews for *all* of the games. We haven't shied away from reviewing some of the more tricky titles. In addition to that we are also very quick off the mark having often prepared the reviews in the background beforehand.

What's the most popular part of the site?
DC: I would like to say our reviews, but at the moment more than ever I would say the comments section of all our news and game pages. There is a large critical mass of retro gamers across Europe, North America and Australia who visit the site regularly to give their two pence on the latest news or games. Sometimes news stories can have more than 100 comments in less than a day, which is frankly overwhelming!

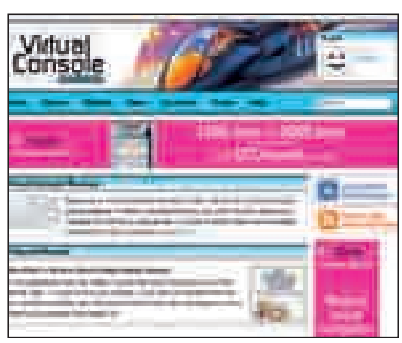
How can our readers contribute?
DC: The easiest way for **Retro Gamer** readers to contribute is by participating on our comments boards. Our reviews are one source of help for someone considering downloading a VC title, but there is always a plethora of varying opinions depending on how rose tinted your retro goggles happen to be. Check out the comments on our *Zelda II* (NES) review to see what I mean!

> "THERE ARE A LOT OF RETRO GAMERS FROM EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA WHO VISIT THE SITE REGULARLY"

What's your favourite game on the VC and why?
DC: My personal favourite game on the Virtual Console has to be *Super Mario World*. A predictably boring choice, but what can I say? After all these years it is still as much fun to play and I never tire of completing all 96 exits every now and then when I have the spare time. I am currently really enjoying *Star Parodier*, which is an import PC-Engine game, however. I didn't get the chance to play this at the time, so I am enjoying it all the more now. That's one of the great things about the VC, every now and then it throws up a forgotten gem such as this.

DEEPER LOOK – WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

VC Reviews
www.vc-reviews.com



Although it's been available for less than two years there's already a huge amount of content available on the Virtual Console download service. But how do you separate the wheat from the chaff and know what's worth buying?

Step forward VC Reviews, possibly the best online site dedicated to Nintendo's online service. It has entertaining reviews up within hours of games being available, artwork by ex-*Mean Machines* artist Gary Harrod and a sense of style and fun that perfectly mimics *Mean Machines*.

Actual features are thin on the ground, but there's lots of news, a great forum and recently added WiiWare reviews, too. If you own a Wii then you need this site in your life.

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but it's a lot of fun.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega.

SEGA-16.COM
www.sega-16.com
Mega Drive site with some incredibly in-depth interviews.

RETRO101
www.retro101.co.uk
It's fairly new, but Retro101 has some informative articles.

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that looks at the US game market.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
All the latest games and a retro section with helpful members.

THE RUBBER BEERMAT
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/
Excellent Spectrum site that champions a lot of rare games.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
This excellent site loves shmups of all descriptions.

SHMUPS
www.shmups.com
Absolutely amazing website dedicated to the best gaming genre of all time.

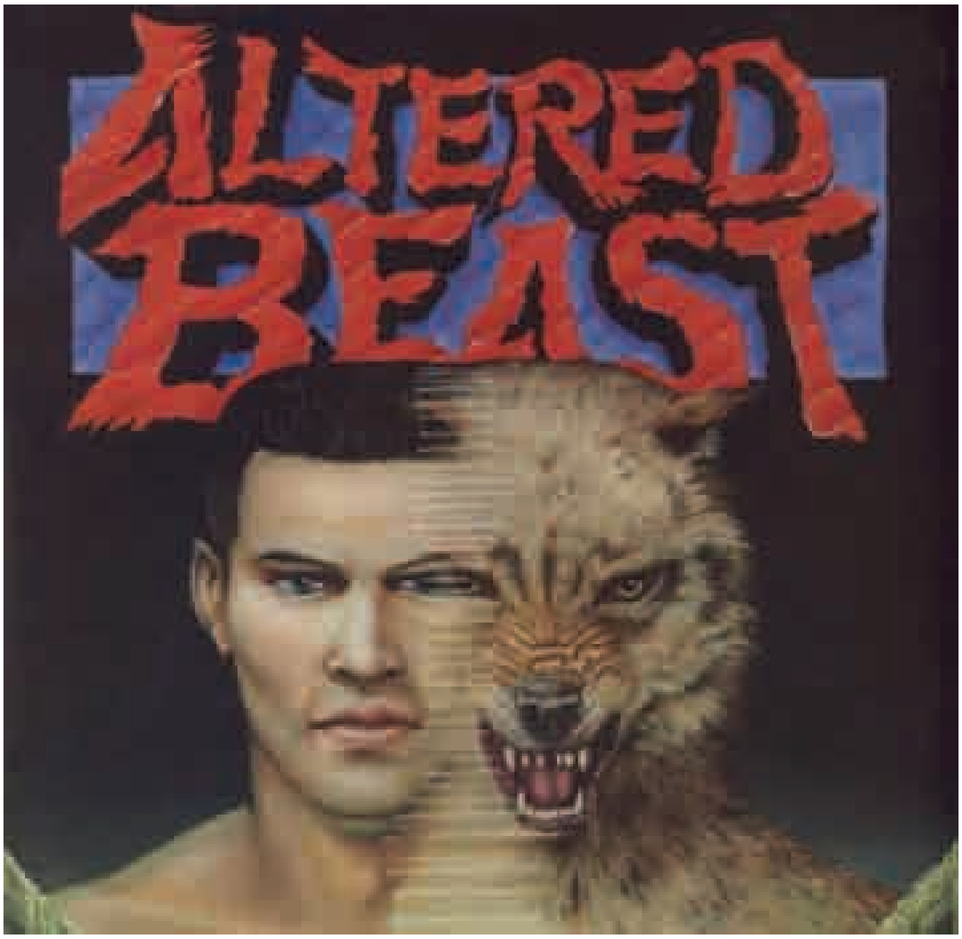
VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, and reviews.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Your one-stop shop for everything VC-related.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory, please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk.

END/GAME



ALTERED BEAST

Sega's scrolling beat-'em-up may be about as fun as running across broken glass in your bare feet, but at least it has an entertaining ending



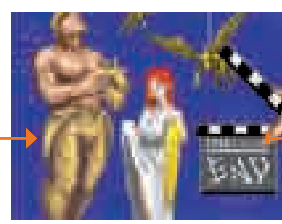
SCREEN 1
After beating Neff in his numerous guises it's time to face him in his final form – a huge bipedal rhino. Worry not though as your werewolf's fireballs (or flaming fists according to Stuart) will make short work of the lumbering giant.



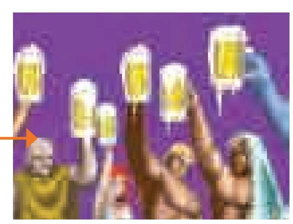
SCREEN 2
After soundly kicking Neff's arse, the humbled fallen God clutches his hand to his chest and appears to suffer a heart attack. Well, wouldn't you be out of shape after morphing into different monstrous forms?



SCREEN 3
The evil one disappears to whatever vile hellhole he was spawned from and you're reunited with Zeus's daughter, Athena. Peace is restored, the bad guy is vanquished and the hero gets the girl. Doesn't he?



SCREEN 4
What's this? Why are the yellow demons hanging on strings? Why has Athena's hair changed colour? Why is the werewolf a man in a suit? Crikey, it's only been a bloody film all along. No wonder the ending's so contrived.



SCREEN 5
Look at that. After fighting so viciously during the game/film, everyone gets together at the end for a good old-fashioned knees-up. It's a heart-warming scene that almost makes the previous 40 minutes bearable. Almost…